

Catherine E. "Betty" Warren

September 17, 1916 – July 30, 2006



... to find the Self

To study meditation
Is to study the self.
To study the self
Is to forget the self.
To forget the self
Is to find the self
In all things.

—Dogen

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Introduction

Betty is one of those individuals who will remain eternal in the minds and hearts of those of us who know her. Here, I am using the word in the present tense, because that is who she is – presence personified.

Betty died on July 30th, 2006, about six weeks shy of her 90th birthday. She was the perennial crone. She made the complex simple, and instilled in us awe for the beauty of nature and that of the human being. When I would walk into her solitary room, at The Redwoods Assisted Living in Mill Valley, California (2000-06), which she described as ‘the finishing school,’ I felt that I was stepping on holy ground and at the same time I felt like I was walking into a playground!

The twinkle in her child-like eyes and her smile lit up the space, which was adorned with memorabilia from her long and rich-filled life – a small altar with Suzuki-roshi’s picture here, another over there with all sorts of nature’s gifts from her many Vision Quests, her precious tool boxes, books, and records everywhere. Her view was the estuary and the San Francisco skyline – heaven as she called it.

I met Betty in the early 1980s when I joined her and Marilyn Riley (now Hende) for my first Vision Quest trip in the Inyo Mountains. The connection was instantaneous. During four subsequent trips our friendship strengthened, and when I moved away I decided that it was time to write her life story. It was too precious to just let it disappear. Although Betty had no children of her own, many loved her dearly.

Her life review with me was a four-year journey, from 2002 to her death in 2006. During that time we explored her life and the treasures of living. The process was not only delightful, but deeply rewarding for all the precious and deep insights that we both discovered within our own selves.

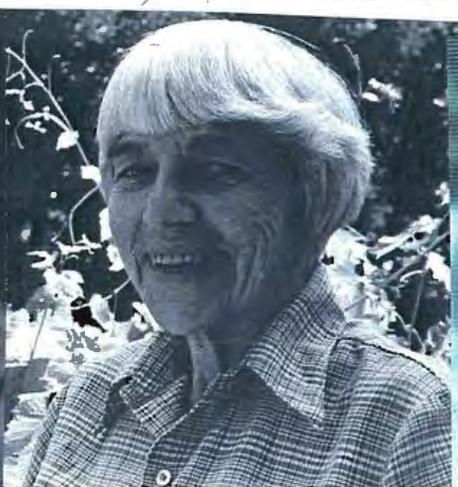
As I began working on the manuscript, which was 328 pages in its original form, I found out that there were certain themes that stood out. Each theme elucidates Betty’s life and it is all in her own words, except when sentences, words, or dates are in brackets. Quotation marks at the beginning and at the end of a sentence denote that it was in written form. Also, most of the quotes within the themes are not chronologically sequential, since a flow of meaning was what I intended to convey. I hope that I have brought into the light, Betty’s own lightness of being.

I would like to thank Marilyn for her precious friendship, her wisdom, her editing, and her gifting of most of the photographs that are in this book.

Betty gave me a list of friends whom she wanted her story to be shared with. You are one of them. It is a gift from her to you.

In her own words...

Nitsa Marcandonatou, Ph.D.
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Berkeley
March 2010





... a brief autobiography

... “This is the story of my blessings: the people, places, and experiences that molded me into who I am today. Not that life was a bed of roses - but that the difficult times were as valuable in lessons as the easy times.

My first blessing and my first teachers were my parents, who, despite their own failure to find happiness together, made me feel loved, wanted, and worthwhile. They gave me every opportunity to develop my potentials.

My mother committed suicide when I was 17, between my 1st and 2nd year of college. My dad died a year later of a stroke. I was never angry that they ‘deserted me,’ only sad that they had to end their lives unfulfilled. I felt quite capable, thanks to them of, ‘carrying on alone.’ As an only child, I was very self-reliant and independent.

Back to the beginning: I was born in Los Angeles, California, on September 17, 1916. We lived in a modest bungalow court, with large lawns. I liked pretty dresses and playing house, ballet dancing, riding in our new car! (quite something then), playing records of Caruso, and going to kindergarten. Dad was in the wholesale hardware business and was a salesman. Mom stayed home with me.

Although their relationship was poor, they always made me feel loved, wanted - that I was a worthwhile human being. They always worked to expand my horizons. If I wanted to make something, or learn something, or do something, within reason of course, they saw to it that I got to do it. For example, if I were interested in shells, they would buy me samples of shells and buy books about them; if I were interested in gardening, they would buy me a few plants, books to read, etc. We went to Catalina every summer, when I was between 8-12 years of age, for two weeks and we went to the shell museum. I got acquainted with some characters there and the natural resources.

My interests were pets. I had ducks, rabbits, guinea pigs, white rats, and a dog. I loved the arts and crafts. They would take me to the local art school, where I learned how to make linoleum prints and pottery. Then I learned archery and I made a bow and arrow. I loved to horseback ride as well.

They complimented and encouraged my studies in school. My interests in school were writing poetry and art. I was really interested in everything. I developed a love for science after I went to college.

I had a pretty good opinion of myself – not that I was stuck up, but that I was ok. My parents never said that I was no good, or judged, or criticized me. They just kept encouraging me in what I wanted to do. They provided a modest, but very adequate home - quiet, clean, stable environment - for the early years. My physical needs, opportunities for growth, and good schooling were always considered.

My mother especially took care of my mental growth. My earliest memories are of her reading to me Mother Goose and the Water Babies. As a former librarian, and as I learned to read, she expanded my book collection to include the children's classics: legends, fact and fantasy, hero stories, nature, travel, adventures, how children lived in other countries, the Swiss Family Robinson, Winnie the Pooh, and Merry Lips, which is the exploits of a tomboy, who – sadly – in the end, grew up to be a nice young lady. It was clear that boys had the best times in the world. Perhaps when I grew up I would be a boy. All these were my friends and teachers in their own way.

At the age of 6, we moved to a duplex in Hollywood. The owner was a contractor and later began to take me to his houses under construction and taught me the use of tools. I became a tomboy, enjoyed building things, and playing football with the neighborhood boys.

I was an only child and had a girl cousin Dorothy, also an only child. My cousin and I often spent vacations together, sometimes with aunt Miggie, at the beach or the mountains. She was the youngest of my mother's six siblings. She was single and lived with their father until he died, taking care of him.

She was my favorite aunt. She used to come and visit us. She would pick my cousin and myself up and she would take us up to Big Bear to stay at a cabin for a week. She showed us things about nature and hiking. We enjoyed that cabin.

She would also take us for donkey rides and taught us how to do our part in keeping the cabin clean. She had us do chores around the cabin. We had to do the dishes, which was great, because I really didn't have any siblings to share jobs with.

My mother's father was a German Evangelical minister, who came with his young wife to raise their family on an orange ranch in Southern California. It included 3 boys and 3 girls. My mother was in the middle. Of course, they had a religious upbringing, and most became nominal Christians. However, my mother could not accept a God who would send anyone to hell and so she married and left home as soon as she could.

Consequently, I was raised without religion and with the freedom to explore and make my own decisions.

My dad was totally against religion. I don't know why. He felt that religions were no good. He was a non-believer. He would make disparaging remarks to my favorite aunt who was a Christian.

At the age of 10, I explored Christianity briefly. One of my playmates, from a religious family next door, persuaded me to go to church with them and join a bible study group. But after several months I suddenly realized that these were not my true teachers and made a hasty retreat.

There was another neighbor who studied Vedanta. She had me interested in Eastern philosophy. I was reading Ouspensky and exploring Asian thought around the age of twelve. I was leaning towards that direction.

My childhood years, **up to the age of 12**, were to try and learn about things, exploring the phenomenal world and I didn't think much about who I really was or myself, but mostly learning about my world. I didn't think of myself as a person with feelings or a personality to promote. I lived in a fairy tale world.

When I was little I thought that I would be a boy when I would grow up. Boys had more interesting things to do. They were the explorers in the jungle and the heroes in the legends. I sort of ignored the fact that I was a girl. It was hard to accept that I was a girl. I would consider professions that would be open to girls, like science, teaching, archeology, etc. I was exploring how I would fit into all this. I was shy of putting myself forward. I tended to stay back. It's a tendency that I kept on for the rest of my life.

I sort of took an observer's view of life. I had a Buddhist view of things before starting Buddhism. I was seeing this parade of life and death going on endlessly – everything being recycled. It was a vague knowing – not conceptualized. I was always interested in seeing how things worked – always curious about how the world worked - so I was interested in science. I wanted to get the fundamental explanation.

In the junior and senior years of high school, I was a good student and enjoyed writing poetry. A friend and I had access to a home printing press, where we each set type and illustrated with block prints a slim volume of poetry called, *Harps of the Winds* [**See Appendix**]. I also had a workshop in the garage, with a jigsaw and tools for crafts.

I was becoming aware that all was not well in the world. Some people were poor and on the edge of survival. Socially, I was a loner and did not go to dances, but did take part in sports.

During my last year in high school I got a dog, Binker, my companion through college, when possible, but sometimes, he was kept by my aunt.

In **1933, at the age of 17**, I started UCLA. When I started college, my parents moved to West Hollywood to be close to my university. In my freshman year I lived at home, so when I would come back from school, I would have these long talks with my mom. She was in poor health then, and dad was still quietly drinking every evening. Mom counseled me, "Never be dependent on a man."

We would talk about my philosophy courses; about Plato and Socrates; what courses I wanted to take; possible professions; and so on. Except she was slipping away into depression and complaining about my dad's drinking. I was just trying to cheer her up, to understand her more.

College was interesting. I took philosophy, science, languages, and fencing. I had a great crush on the grad student in charge of the latter. My social conscience was also awakened. A friend and I campaigned for Upton Sinclair, a Socialist, for Governor.

In the summer after my freshman year, my mother committed suicide, so we gave up the house. Dad went to his sister's. I felt numb. I spent a lot of time going for walks and mostly building sand or dirt castles. There was a vacant lot next door and I would make mounds with a road going down this mountain and roll a small jack's ball down. I remember vaguely playing in the dirt or sand making the ball roll down. I was keeping my attention there, but feeling sort of numb.

My aunt took me to La Jolla where I would go for long walks by myself along the waterfront. I was just walking, not thinking of anything, and feeling numb. I wasn't doing any deep thinking, just being alive and going through this time. I don't think I cried much, but I walked a lot and alone along that waterfront. These two activities helped me heal.

I also liked to take early morning walks to sit on a grassy hill and write or dream. The Beverly Hills University Women's Club gave me a dress and \$100. I knew that I wanted to continue at UCLA, so when classes began in the fall, I shared a dormitory room with my cousin.

My dad died the next year from a massive stroke, but he was broke and left me no money. I managed to get by with a NYA (Federal student job), assorted housework, and baby-sitting jobs. So I survived as was possible

in those days – late 30s and early 40s – without a debt. My energy, attention, and focus went for my survival.

By my junior year, I had made other friends, as I had awakened politically and joined in peace rallies and in the clubs that organized them. Four of us women rented a tiny house not far from campus. We had an old mimeograph machine and became adept in preparing left wing propaganda campus newsletters and announcements of political meetings and events. We all subsisted on NYA jobs plus odd jobs. One of these friends, Kay, is still dear and she is still active in social justice work.

We all moved to Berkeley, and went to UCB, after three years at UCLA. We took a large rooming house apartment. Kay's parents were now in town and this was the focus of our political and social group. But I became more interested in my studies and took many teachers' credential classes. I also became more interested in people.

In **1937, at the age of 20**, I got my first car, a Model A Ford for \$100. I received my BA degree at UCB in Science and Math and a few years later I got my teacher's certificate there. I then moved to an apartment that was above a store on Telegraph Avenue and I set up my tools. I got a job in woodcarving and learned the skills for the gift shop.

In **1938, at the age of 21**, I had my first relationship with Micky, but she moved to New York. She got married, had 4 kids, and is now in a long-term lesbian relationship. We have kept contact through the years.

In **1942, at the age of 26**, I got a job in Sutter, about 2-3 hour's drive north of San Francisco. It's near Yuba City. Now I had a second car, a \$200 Plymouth. The first year of teaching, four teachers bordered at a farm and taught at the school there. We used to say that one cow is all we needed to have whipped cream on everything. We dined very well!

I spent the summer in the shipyards doing plumbing drafting and learned those skills. Teaching was a challenge. I felt too young and inadequate. A girl in my math and science classes invited me to her grandfather's ranch and taught me horseback riding and rounding up cattle. This continued through my second year teaching in Sutter. We are still in contact.

During my second year of teaching, the same teachers and I lived in a little house that we rented. During the third year (**1944**), I finally moved to San Francisco with a teaching job in Oakland. I first lived in a dump of an apartment and it's from there that I bought the house in Sausalito, where I lived for 53 years and commuted to Oakland. (**In 1959**, when I

met Suzuki, I would first stop at the Zen Center in San Francisco, do my meditation, and then go to Oakland to teach).

In **1944, at the age of 28**, I got a job teaching in Oakland at Hoover Junior High School. Teaching was difficult. I didn't know how to make math and science relevant to the mostly black, underprivileged kids.

During that time I met Kathleen, a friend of a friend in Berkeley, who soon moved in with me for a brief period of time. She had a lot of classical records, which I learned to enjoy and began to collect them also. It was to be the beginning of a life-long passion. I also worked part time in a record shop.

Kathleen got married and they bought a little house in Sausalito, but in a year or so, they got a divorce. They thought that the house would be great for me and I agreed. I had saved no money, but the house was only \$5500. They had put \$2300 in it and told the realtor that I had paid them the \$2300, so I could take over the \$35 a month mortgage and move in. I paid them back gradually from my teacher's salary. This was one of my great blessings. I had found my HOME.

In **1947, at the age of 31**, I had found my place. I fixed it up comfortably. I did many repairs and cleared the garden. Now I could have a dog again - an Airedale this time. I had a workshop and tools and I collected discarded building materials in order to build a new back porch. I also planted many fruit trees. Music and records became less important at that time.

Teaching was still difficult, but I persevered. Sometimes I would get deeply depressed. I considered suicide - why bother? But I decided that: Life was either worth while or it wasn't. So I would give it a chance: I would ACT AS IF IT WERE WORTH WHILE and see what happened - it was WORTHWHILE!

In **1953, at the age of 37**, I met Rudy - my great love. She moved in with me and we had a loving relationship for about 5 years. But I wasn't aware that my self-reliance and independence made her feel inadequate and depressed. She left me, but we have remained friends throughout our lives.

When we separated I was terribly upset and one night I awoke in the middle of the night, floating near the ceiling. A Voice spoke to me: **"Everything is All Right - Nothing can Ever Harm You!"** It was so authentic that I believed it. I have always remembered the Voice, and repeat it when necessary. It's an ever-present refuge, to be discovered over and over again.

In **1955, at the age of 39**, I took classes at San Francisco State toward a master's degree in education. The topic of my thesis was, *Growing Up: an Experiment in the Seventh Grade Arithmetic*. It was a thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the Psychology and Education Department at San Francisco State University. I received my Master's in Education in August 19, 1955.

In **1959, at the age of 43**, I became interested in Zen, read books, listened to Alan Watts, and took a class at the San Francisco Asian Academy. Our teacher knew Suzuki-roshi and when the latter came to San Francisco from Japan, he invited Suzuki to visit our class. We were charmed. He said, "I sit every morning at 6:00 a.m. Please join me." Three women from the class did so, including Della Goertz and Jean Ross. The meditation group grew and soon the Zen Center was born.

This proved to be the greatest of blessings - I found my spiritual home. There was nothing to believe in except one's own Buddha Nature. Just sit and listen. Nothing to depend on. Everything is change. Everyday life is important. Grateful to be alive. Compassion. This has been my guide ever since - daily meditation and the Prajna Paramita Mantra.

The Zen Center was incorporated. We bought the Page Street building in San Francisco and Tassajara Hot Springs. Suzuki-roshi died in 1971, but the Zen Center continued to grow. I continued going there for about five years and then I found that it was becoming a big organization and I didn't like big organizations.

I became less active then, but continued my practice alone, with occasional visits, and regular donations. It was still my spiritual home. I made trips to Tassajara with Della and we enjoyed our time there.

I continued to teach at several junior and senior high schools in Oakland. It was a daily struggle to interest the kids. I was happy to retire in **June of 1975, at the age of 59**. The following years were spent with friends, environmental studies, and trips. Rudy and Kathleen were now partnered. Sometimes Micky took a vacation here and we all went to the mountains, sometimes with the dog - now a Poodle.

After my retirement, Rudy and I became more serious about backpacking in the Sierras, making one or two trips each summer. We did the John Muir Trail, with laterals, over 25 years and 1000 miles.

We also took car camping trips to the Canadian Rockies, some National Parks, like Glacier Park, to the Southwest, and to the East Coast. Micky and I car camped and rafted down the Grand Canyon. We went around

the rim and rafted down to Lake Powell and then took the plane back up north to our car. It was an adventure of a lifetime.

I often drove with the dog to Los Angeles for Christmas to be with my cousin, sometimes stopping in Santa Barbara to see old college friends. Friendships have lasted long. My best friends today date from college, although partners have switched.

In **1979, at the age of 63**, after retiring, I did volunteer work at Friends of the Earth in San Francisco, with David Brower. I answered mail and compiled a book under the name of *Energy and Environment*. I also made checklists, set up tables at energy fairs, and campaigned for environmental issues against pesticides. In Sausalito, Kathy Mayer and I began a City Pest Management Committee, and with others, wrote and got passed a city ordinance limiting city pesticide use. I fought for the Nuclear Safeguards initiative and worked with the League of Women Voters on energy issues.

In **1987, at the age of 71**, a new era begins - the Vision Quest. I met Marilyn at a Marin Environmental Forum meeting, where she came to speak about the Vision Quest. The vice president of the forum had stars in her eyes when she introduced Marilyn to me. So I got interested and asked her to put my name on her list. Marilyn phoned her to tell her that she was taking a trip on the spring of 1988. I told Marilyn that although I was 71 years old, I still went hiking! I asked her if she wanted a letter from a doctor for me to go on that trip and of course Marilyn said no. I did not yet realize that the Vision Quest was my next calling.

After my first trip, which was extremely enjoyable, I realized that I wanted to work with Marilyn. I was retired and had the freedom to help her out. She said to go to the next trip as an assistant. I had a lot of camping experience and so I went to the next trip, which went well.

Consequently, I joined Marilyn and helped her as much as I could, because I had a good car, a space for the pre-quest meetings, and I was interested in getting the necessary permits and insurances for the trips. We have worked together for twelve years and have gone on 60 trips [See page 57]. Now, Marilyn, her husband John, and I are family. In **June of 1999**, I took my last Vision Quest trip. I was **83 years old**.

On **November 15th, 2000, at the age of 84**, I moved into The Redwoods Assisted Living in Mill Valley and have been here ever since. I am learning to be with others in a way that I have never done before. I love being here, because I am living my life to the fullest."



Betty at 4 1/2 years old



Betty with her Grandmother



Betty with her mother



Betty with her parents in Catalina Island, CA





Betty and cousin Dorothy in Catalina Island, CA.



Betty with cousin Dorothy in
Idylwild, CA.



Betty, 12 years old, in the
Southern California desert





Betty(R) and friend at the UCLA campus, CA.



Betty, 20 years old, with her first car, model A Ford-rumble seat. Art, a friend, helping her remove the head gasket in order to fix it ~ Berkeley, CA.

... on life

... “There are many starts and repeats – much too confusing to sort out. Perhaps keep pages roughly in this order. This might begin the book:

This is the story of one person’s journey from the illusion of separateness to a realization of the oneness of existence. There was no map or plan for the journey, no conscious goal to be attained. In some mysterious fashion the misfortunes and the opportunities of a lifetime combined to bring about the integration.

Observation: A factor in the early aloneness was being an only child. It fostered self-reliance and independence. The death of my parents, when I was 17 and 18 years old, furthered this. I wanted to make my own decisions, hence never married, or even established a long-term lesbian relationship – although I had a number of lifelong friendships. This independence of mine was, for many years, a hindrance to realizing the oneness of life and joining the Zen Center.

To my Buddhist friends, who may wonder why I never donned the robe and joined the sangha (monastic life), as did many of the early meditation group members, who gathered around Suzuki-roshi in the early 1960s:

Some 88 years ago, I was born, separated from my mother, to be a separate individual. I was an only child and so did not have to share my little universe with siblings. I was free to follow my own interests, without considering others.

I had an individualistic, self-centered view, and being an only child I had to work out things on my own, making decisions and such, as well as working through college. I had an individualistic outlook on life. Somehow I turned away from being in a big establishment. I wanted to make my own decisions. I didn’t care for all the ceremonies with all the trappings. I didn’t want to throw myself into that, although I was very taken by Suzuki and deeply loved him and respected him.

Another reason why I did not join the sangha, at the age of 43, was that when my parents died I had had to consider how to make a living. I just had to concentrate on getting along in the world by myself. Joining the sangha, in the middle of my teaching career, would have meant dropping that support. I had been tenured. I was not going to drop that position. I don’t know how I would have made a living, if I joined or devoted myself entirely to studying Buddhism. So I hang onto what was security to me.

Also the call of the wild was very strong at the time. I wanted to be in nature rather than become a priest.

So, little by little, as you give service to others, or live with, or work with, or meditate with others, the feeling of community grows. It is a physical feeling, an energy, a presence that you gradually become aware of your self in all things and aware that you are not separate, but are one with the universe.”

... [On November 6, 1997, Betty wrote a letter to Dr. Tom Pinkson, a spiritual teacher in the Native American tradition, and a therapist. He asked Betty to contribute some material he was gathering about elder hood]

“Dear Tom,

My apologies for not seeming to participate in the Wednesday gathering re: *Becoming a Wisdom Elder*. As I said, I get tired early, plus my old hearing aid was not working although I'd just put in a new battery. I'm getting a new one, but it is taking time. I could hear the sound of your voice, but it did not form many intelligible words.

The words I did hear were confusing. At the end of the evening, I could not make out what the others were saying, so I remained silent. The drumming did come across, which was most beautiful.

The evening has stimulated many thoughts that have taken shape as I went on a morning walk on the hill behind my house. It is not exactly a wilderness here, but it will have to do, since I do not have the time or energy to go climb Mt. Tam. It is partly utilitarian and partly natural open space, with native oak, holly, bay, pine, cypress, and imported eucalyptus. Dirt roads lead to a Water Company underground storage tank and to a Sausalito Corporation Yard dump and composting area.

It is littered with waste: streamers of downed eucalyptus bark and branches, rotting plastic and assorted chunks of glass, concrete, and lumber. It is a paradise for weeds. All of the local unwanted plants flourish here: poison oak, fennel, hemlock, nightshade, scotch broom, mustard, brambles, mushrooms, purple thistle, yellow thistle, flowering borage, alum, and clover.

As I walk, I am thinking: Is some of this sacred? Some profane? But they cannot be separated. It is all one, sacred, a miracle. This realization is an important step in becoming a wisdom elder, not just to know it intellectually, having read or heard it, but also to feel the connection in this moment, to live it, to know that that is sacred, because I am sacred and we are One.

As you said, the wisdom elder pays careful attention to the most important things, or perhaps, becomes the important things. And what is important? Love is the most important, perhaps the only important thing. There is love (not to be confused with attachment) of oneself; of other individuals or groups of human beings; of other living creatures; of just causes; of ideals; of beauty; of nature; of the Earth; of Life itself; of the Great Mystery; of God. It is the opening of the self to give and receive one's true essence and all true essences—The Buddha-Nature—the Great Spirit that dwells in all things.

Becoming a wisdom elder is learning to live the pretty words we repeat. When we are young we often have deep insights and noble resolutions that slip away before they reach our hearts and become us. Each of us is a work in progress; always changing and growing, yet at any moment complete, ready to return to the source.

A wisdom elder has a sense of urgency to be present in every moment and yet has a feeling of timelessness: all the time in the world is Here and Now.

Thank you for a very thought-provoking evening,

Love, Betty”

... “So it is that in these last four years, living at The Redwoods in a community of 300, being active with the Seniors for Peace, and sitting with my meditation groups, I have begun to put the pieces together and know and feel that I am not separate.

And so, after many detours, I am beginning to feel at home on this planet, in this universe, closer to the never stated goal of oneness.”

... “What describes my life is what Dogen, a great Japanese Zen master, said:

To study meditation is to study the self.
 To study the self is to forget the self.
 To forget the self is to find the self in all things.

The Feiffer cartoon is another way of describing my life. Ever since I was little I was looking for the answer. I went to Sunday school with my neighbors – but stopped short of joining. It seemed unreal. I went to a psychiatrist, but left when he said that I would have to change my entire orientation to life and become heterosexual, but my true self cried out NO.”

... “In the course of this long life of 88 some odd years, I have been many things to many people. Although I have been more at home in relationships with women, I do not wish to be labeled by my sexual orientation. That is too limiting and I am continually metamorphosing. Rather, I would be understood as a human being in search of wholeness - a work in progress.

I find that the Buddha’s way is unsurpassable, and most truly expresses my inmost nature. And so you can call me an activist for universal love.”

... I don’t classify myself with a label and people seem to accept me for who I am. I am simply myself and myself includes both aspects of my person. For everyday living I am a female, but in other ways, I have more the masculine ways of thinking. There are degrees of being one or the other. I am more female, but the other, the masculine, interpenetrates. One does not shut out the other at one time or another. The situation is continually changing. It’s a very flexible boundary.

... Early on in life, I was curious about life in general. I had a ‘way-seeking mind,’ from the beginning. I wanted to know the answer to many questions about the world. What was it all about? What was the meaning of life? Even as a child I was worried about death. What was life and death about? At the time, I was about ten years old or so. This was a big question in my mind.

I was interested in the questions you see. I wanted to know what’s the meaning of life. If you have to die, what’s the meaning of living? Eventually, I stumbled into the answer, which only came very recently. And in my opinion the answer is that the meaning of life is living it. There’s no meaning outside of life that will give it meaning. Living it, gives it meaning.

... As for my education, I was left without any funds and was on my own to make decisions. I had to work my way through and I knew that medicine is a very long and expensive trip. I was taking pre-med courses, but there were going to be many years of going to school and I had no money, so I had to trim down my goals.

So teaching was the next step. At the time, I thought that I should do something more sociably conscientious - to do something for the good for people. I liked the subjects of natural history, biology, and chemistry. So I thought that teaching would be my career, since those subjects were along my interests. It was the next best thing to medicine.

... I taught for 33 years in the public schools in Oakland. There were kids that nobody wanted to teach. They were mostly black and poor and I felt that I had an obligation to help them.

So I had schoolwork to do and listen to music. Time did not hang heavy on my hands. I had more things to do than I had time to do them in. I never felt lonely, that I wanted somebody around. I don't remember feeling lonely anytime. I didn't feel that if I had somebody here that I would be happy.

... When I was involved with the Zen Center, I was living in Sausalito and was teaching in Oakland. I would make breakfast, make a sandwich and a thermos with coffee, and go from Sausalito to the old church in San Francisco, where we started our first meditation group. And then after the service, I would go on to school and take my little breakfast to the teacher's lounge. I had my breakfast, did my plans and preparations for the day. I felt that I had already done the hardest thing - the meditation, the sitting. So the teaching was not that hard.

... "What has been of interest to me throughout my life are the following:

- Meditation
- Suzuki-roshi
- Politics; activism; peace
- Creative work; poetry; making things just to make them; or useful things like furniture
- Artist
- Carpentry
- Gardener – growing, conserving, and preserving
- Vision quester
- Nature; environmental studies
- Exploring
- Music
- Jack-of-all-trades and master of none. I never excelled in something
- Interested in finding a partner, but nothing really came out of it, except Rudy and exploring the mountains with her
- Love of animals (rabbits, ducks, dogs, cats). Dogs take a lot of work and attention to take care of them, so I can't have one right now
- Wanted to spend all of my attention to understanding what it was all about – the search of what was reality
- Education – exploring various subjects like biology and math

Now in The Redwoods, this room is my last creative effort. It has all the things that I am interested in, except the animals. I have everything with me here that I feel that is close to my nature. All of these above topics are

in a sense here with me. And the room includes the view of the estuary and the San Francisco skyline. It's great."

... When I lived in Sausalito, I loved to garden. I had a big one where I grew my organic vegetables and had many fruit trees. I grew lettuce, tomatoes, beans, peas, eggplants, chard, onions, squash, zucchini, and different berries. I also planted all the fruit trees, such as, a variety of apples, plums, oranges, and a lemon tree. I canned a lot, like tomato sauce, applesauce, plums, and dried prunes and apples. Now Marilyn and John have to take care of all that.

... You know that I have never owned a TV set in my life. Never. Despite the fact that when TV came out I was working off hours in the record department of a place that sold TV sets. I sold records but they also sold the first TV that came in. I knew that I wanted none of it.

So many people follow the fashions of TV instead of finding their own truth about it. So I didn't want it. It is doing a lot of harm to our culture. And I didn't want to waste any time following its dictum, because in so many families, TV became the nursemaid of their children, who followed the superficial dictums.

I know that there are some wonderful documentaries that I would enjoy, but I feel that it's doing a lot of damage to our children, whose ideas are formed from what they see on TV, that their young minds do not develop their potentiality. Even documentaries are part of the whole program to make people feel good about it and to show people what a good thing it is.

I never liked movies either. I just don't like to watch anything on a screen. It's the whole process of watching something that's not real. I have a problem with reality. I don't want to watch anything that's not real. I wonder what's a real thing, because images are unreal to me. I want to make sure that what I am seeing is real and not an image.

... Something that we have not discussed is my woodworking. I have always been making things, crafts, as soon as I had scissors. I would do things out of cardboard and paper and then I got into various crafts.

I had a workshop in the garage. The owner of the duplex, where we lived, made me a workbench. He would take me out to the construction site and had me help him built a house. I had one project after another.

I would set up pens for the various pets that I had, like ducks. I would also be involved in gardening projects making a tiny pool in the garden, one or two feet across – a concrete pool. I also made miniature gardens

with a small fishpond and plants around it. I made a miniature golf course in a 2x2 box and would play with a marble and a stick pushing it around the course.

At the beach, I would always make something on the sand, like a golf course, a castle, and some sort of a mound with a pathway to roll down the marbles from.

In college I had a workshop in the garage and made wooden jewelry. I crafted a box with a carved scarab on top, silver bracelets, rings, pins, and buttons. I was always collecting materials and tools for various crafts. By my 3rd and 4th year in college I was skillful and was on my own.

... One day I was walking down Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley and I saw a sign in a gift shop saying, 'Jigsaw Operator Wanted.' By that time I had a jigsaw of my own, so I went in and showed him a few pieces of wooden jewelry that I had made. They put me at a table to learn woodcarving from a German craftsman. I made 33 cents an hour. That was in my senior year at UC Berkeley. I worked two years at this place and learned how to work on the electric one as well. It was difficult.

... I would take pleasure in the artistic creation and the nice thing about working with wood is that wood, the tool, and you, are all combined to produce an affect. The wood is an active participant of this whole thing. It's about the feeling of the nature of the wood. You go with the grain of the wood. You feel the chip curling up. I would feel one with the wood. You have to understand the nature of that particular wood. The tool will help you do that.

During my first year of teaching I created this statue of a woman. I was inspired by Hemingway's work, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and this was my idea of the spirit of Pillar.

When I got the house in Sausalito, I went more into carpentry and house construction. I had to put a new roof on. At first I tried to do things by myself as much as I could. I put a set of felt/tar paper on the roof. Then I put water pipes around the yard, to water the garden. I knew how to do that, because during the war I had a summer job with a draft plumber, making the plans for plumbing. So I knew how fittings worked. I borrowed a pipe cutter and a threader so I could cut the pipes at length and thread them.

Then I made furniture and shelving as needed. I made cabinets for my growing record collection. I also built a front porch and a larger back porch. I poured the foundation for it, framed it, and put the siding and

roofing. I put a little roof over the front door as well. It was a carpentry job. I did a lot of fencing around the yard as well. I also did terracing in the garden with many concrete blocks to hold up the terraces. I would do all these projects during the summer vacation. The house, as myself, was a work in progress.

So I've been shaping my environment at The Redwoods as well - moving in and fixing it. This is the environment for this stage of my life. I think that I got started on this, because as a child I liked building blocks, arranging and rearranging them. And so now I have created my music stands and drawers and cabinets from scraps of wood that I had picked up from the dump.

Here I made this sign that I carry on Fridays at the peace rally that we have at the corner. On one side it says, 'Work with the UN' and on the other side it says, 'Be Peace, Live Peace, World Peace.' That's what we have to be in order to have peace in the world.

... I don't wear jewelry. I don't wear anything like that. I wore earrings once in my life and that was when I was in a play in school. I used to like wearing rings, but I don't wear them anymore. No jewelry. I don't like anything around my neck. When I lean over, it's flopping and it's in the way. The scented soap I think is something superfluous. People think, 'Oh, that's something nice,' but I don't feel that way. I don't like something extra.

... I do things more naturally, but I'm not good at that. Like I can't dance. I'm afraid to dance with anyone around here. I'm rather shy. Mostly we learn to accept things as they are.

... I eat very well. I don't go for recipes. I eat very simply and wholesome. I cooked for myself for many years. For breakfast, I would have cereal and then for lunch some leftovers or bread and cheese and nuts and some dried fruit. For supper I would make something that would last for a few days.

I would make scrambled eggs with vegetables. I would do something fast like a pasta dish that would last a few days. It was something that would serve the purpose, wholesome, and easy to fix.

When I would cook the pasta and cheese I would put into it all kinds of vegetables that would be fast to cook. I always had enough, but simple. I could make turkey dinner for Thanksgiving, especially when I was with Rudy. My mom taught me to like things that were good for me.

.... I do try to eat thoughtfully and mindfully. Mueslix is interesting, because every bite is different. There's always a surprise in each bite. I try to be aware of what a miracle it is to put the food in and what happens to it.

The food becomes me. So what is this miracle of transformation that's taking place? How can food become me if we are not already the same? We transform what we eat into us. It's another example as to how we are all one. If food was not already us, we would not be able to take it in. Perhaps that is what Ken Wilber means when he is saying that everything is 'one taste!'

... I had the good fortune to like what is good for me. I guess I trusted that it would lead me to more understanding. For example, the backpacking led me to some wonderful experiences and then the Vision Questing included not only the beauty, but also the helping of people to come along with me to appreciate this experience of non-duality.

Another example would be that when I was little, I liked vegetables and did not object to the good food that was given to me. And now we know that vegetables are good for you. Also later on I was drawn into experiences that were good for me like having a small garden at home as a child, where I tried to take care of it and make it beautiful.

As for thinking about other people, my social awareness that is, well, that took longer to surface. It came in bits and pieces, like the first step, being my involvement with the radical movement; teaching; Suzuki-roshi and the Zen Center; Vision Questing; personal friends along the way; and now The Redwoods.

... I don't think that I've mentioned this, but for many years I've been corresponding with a prisoner in Colorado. When I was working at the Friends of the Earth's office in the 60s, I had to answer all kinds of different questions regarding the environment. People were asking for information about nuclear power and so on.

So I got a letter from this man who wrote to me, "Since you are a friend of the earth could you be a friend of mine and correspond with me?" I wrote back and found out that he was a Native American prisoner. He had grown up in a poor area in New Mexico. When he was a kid his parents were alcoholic and they would put him out of the house. He would walk around and educate himself, which was on the streets. He would steal bikes, pick pockets, and what not. I think that he didn't have a teacher at the right time and he took the road towards crime.

Rudy and I made a cross-country trip to New York and stopped to see him for a brief visit. I've written to him for years now and I am still receiving letters from him. He's been in and out of prison. He is in for life now. He is studying law books so he can write legal briefs to fight for his case. "There's no such thing as justice in this world," he says. He has had a miserable life. So how come? Some people get good teachers and some people get none. I was surely glad to have met him.

... As for books, my old time favorite is *The Four Quartets* by T.S Eliot, which I have read over and over again. It's music. The words are so smooth to say. This book was close to my bed you see. I would read it when I was in a low mood. It was an expression of what I was feeling. It seemed to go with what I was feeling.

... I ordered *The Hidden Messages in Water* from the small bookstore in Mill Valley. My mind was boggled. The implication of this is fantastic.

Water is life. Life is found where there's water. It's such a universal part of life and how it can be responsive, is mind-boggling. It responds and acts in its own way. It means that all of life is doing its own thing – being sensitive and responsive. It's a whole new quality of life that is so universal. Water is universal and it is life. The universe then makes sense.

This quality of water is maybe the Buddha Nature of all life. It's very fundamental and also very reassuring that there is this Buddha Nature and we share it with everything else. So it's sort of a reassurance or vindication that one has this hidden treasure within oneself. Everything has this Buddha Nature. So it's a very profound message.

... I relate water to myself in that we have so many different types of liquids in our own body. We are about 80% water. We are water. It's not just pretty crystals or some other stuff. The quality of liquids is in operation in every part of our body – like blood, urine, and such. They are all alive too.

We are not just a head, just walking around. We are a lot like a community of solids and liquids that are doing their thing in relation to each other. We are a vast community of things. Each is having its own life and somehow we are the sum total of our blood, bones, muscles, hormones, and other liquids. I don't know where the mind comes in. Somehow the mind is formed by all these sub totals.

... I think most of my vices are being unaware of others. I am more absorbed in my own thoughts and problems and so on. I am not as considerate of people as I should be. I am not involved or aware of other

people's feelings and problems – not as compassionate. I think that I am too much self-centered.

I don't have any specific habits or things other than that. I don't indulge in any bad eating habits. I am just not too aware of others. I don't drink. I don't drink coffee. I don't eat candy. I nibble on roasted nuts, but they are good for me. I have one piece of dried fruit perhaps after dinner, but I don't eat compulsively.

I would like to change this self-centeredness I think - to be more concerned, compassionate, and aware of others - to sort of do nice things for other people. I am sort of closed down and I think that it has to do with the fact that I am not being able to see or hear well. I am limited, by not seeing and hearing things. When I go down to the dining room, it's difficult to take any part in the conversation.

... I guess in a way I have always been aware. My viewpoint has not been personal but universal. In a way my center was not myself but that of the world. It sounds kind of contradictory.

Like in meditation one learns to shift the point of view from where you observe life – from the individual outlook to the universal outlook. The individual sort of melts away and you become a citizen of the world and the universal you, loses this individual concern. This sort of says the opposite of what I said a while ago. I can't explain the contradiction there, other than the individual self melts into the universal.

Living at The Redwoods, I act as an individual and not get all involved in the activities, but my universal self is beyond just being sociable. I am not generally sociable any way. I am alone in feeling that I am part of the universe. I am alone and together at the same time. I am not generally sociable, but I am feeling part of the larger society of the human race of life, but not the everyday, sociable feelings.

... At the time with Suzuki-roshi, I felt the need to get out of my preoccupation with my little self. But I didn't want to give up the comfortableness of my life. I did not want to give it up and go with the group at the Zen Center. I had to work and the house occupied my time. I liked to do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it. All this was part of my little self, unfolding.

I also didn't really want a companion. I had good friends and lots of projects. I was earning a living and had to attend to my garden. I was also involved in various environmental causes. I was not doing much in becoming more socialized.

So living alone in my little house slowed down my journey. It gave me time to look within and gave me time to explore nature and see that I was nature too. Although it slowed things down, it deepened things more. All this was very necessary for my journey. Every step in one's life is necessary.

... I do feel that I have not gone as deeply into my emotions as I have gone into my intellect. I don't feel about things. I just do them. Maybe it's a colder approach to life. I've been more in a world of abstractions than understanding my emotions, my intuition, what I really wanted, and understanding how to express myself.

... I have a lack in trust. I think that it's a trait. Even when I am calm and peaceful, the next thing I do is worry about something and then I have to learn again that it will turn out all right after all. It's human nature perhaps. I think that everybody has to learn to trust over and over again.

So the experience of everyday life can teach us to trust. It's hard to let go, unless you have trust. So you are constantly experimenting with letting go – being caught up in the lack of trust. Perhaps, this is something you learn in sitting meditation. You learn to trust your seat that you can't slip off it. It's hard sometimes. At the beginning it's not a firm seat. It takes years to find your seat and then it seems that it's immovable.

... So what I am learning is that you and everything else are not separate. Every morning, I look out of my window for five minutes, watching and trying to absorb the scenery and take every little detail in – the woman and her dog, or a bird flying by, knowing that there's sunshine hidden in it. I am only here, because that bird flew over.

It's a wonderful way to feel who you really are. You are only here, because that's there. You are it. You are everything.

You look out there and there's no beginning and no end. Nothing is moving, but it's moving, because a few hours later the creek has changed. Twenty-four hours later, the same scene is back again. Almost. It's never really the same.

It moves without moving. We move on such a different time frame from what the creek moves. The tide has its own rhythm and we have our own rhythm.

Everything is really happening at once. The tide is moving with the sun and the moon. They are all in synchronicity with the whole planetary system and the system of the universes. And our motion is in

synchronicity with all the other motions of planets and heavenly bodies – all within rhythms, within rhythms.

Everybody sees the world from one's own viewpoint, but it's all there. It's all the same. Everybody looks at it from a different place and think that's what it is. I look from my window, another person looks at the view from his or her own window and sees something entirely different. Whatever window we happen to look out from, we get that particular perspective of the marsh. But it's all the same.

... I had a very beautiful experience the other day. You know the Star of Bethlehem? I think it's Venus and at a certain rare time, which this happened to be, it was closer to the earth and it was visible in the early morning. It's called the Morning Star. It was the star that guided the wise men to baby Jesus. But this week it was close to the earth again. It is a very beautiful sight and I happened to see it. I didn't really know that it was coming.

I could see it, because it was so bright. I can see the moon when it rises. That star was as bright as the moonrise. Mars is sort of reddish color, but Venus is brilliant. It puts you in awe of nature and how everything is synchronized – Venus arising when the sky is dark enough to shine. That happens rarely. That's what happened this week. That's my big event of the week.

... I am a heretic. I have not followed the path of a Zen student. I have not lived at the Zen Center or gone to it, or Green Gulch regularly. I have not been part of the sangha - only the first five years.

I have never had a robe or made a rakusu, although I sewed one but never put it together. It's a bib-like thing that serious students sew themselves. I have not worn a robe and so I am sort of an outsider in that respect. I have not been a real part of the sangha. I have just done a lot of sitting by myself.

Well, I have been an unusual sort of student. When I first started, I did not like things like ceremony, wearing a robe, and that sort of thing. All I did was listen to Suzuki-roshi and sit. It seems to have been the way to go for me. I guess I was a lay follower.

So you see I was not a model disciple. I opted to continue my lay life by keeping a job and living alone. I did not want to live with other people. Living at The Redwoods is an entirely new experience for me. And I don't know why I was ready to do it at this time. It's very untypical of me. I came into this without any objection. Other people move in here kicking and screaming, not wanting to leave their home and family.

... So my life's work is to find out who I am. I don't think I can say that I have been trying to save people, but more knowing who I am. I guess that's everybody's life work, is to find out who they are and maybe help others along the way to find out who in turn they are.

When I taught school I was good at that and I think that I found out a lot about my capabilities. Then when I co-lead the Vision Quests I was finding out more of who I was and that helped other people to find out who they were as well. And now, living here with these little meditation classes, I am receiving much more than I give out. This is a time where I have found out that giving is the same as receiving. So I would say that I have learned more about myself as I have tried to help other people.

Service might be the most important way to finding out who you are. It's a very important way of transforming your attachments to individuals through compassion, which is shared by service to others. For example, Gandhi gave his life to service. Not only religious people do service, but also many others do that without them knowing it, like teachers or parents raising a family.

... I have no self-notion. My only hope is to increase my understanding of reality.

... I am getting a glimpse that my awareness is just a little corner of all awareness. It's not mine in particular. So I can't say that I contributed anything. I just got a glimpse of what was there.

... I wanted to enjoy the beauties of the mountains and the deserts and the seashore – nature - and somehow with all of that I gradually understood that I was an integral part of nature. And as I studied Zen and meditation the picture kind of unfolded. I did not go by planning to achieve something. I just wanted to know what's the answer. And the answer is no answer and nobody knows. It's not possible to know. Then we must enjoy our lives. If you cannot know, the answer what you do is - Enjoy!

... Reality opens up in little pieces. I can't say that I have had an enlightenment of the big picture. I just feel more at home in this universe – a feeling of belongingness; sort of know what to do here. Like when I get up, I meditate and then I take a bath and then I eat breakfast. I still do a lot of *selfing*, but I try not to. This is a marvelous place to understand your self and being alive and not worrying that you are going to be dead soon.

... I read the following in Bill Kwong's newsletter. It says, 'We are all in a box and we try to get liberated and to do so we must understand that we *are* the box.' So liberation from the box is by realizing that we are the box. Interesting to think about it.

... So I am always asking, "What is it all about?" Do you remember Feiffer's cartoon, about the man asking the question, "What is the answer?" So I am still that girl asking, "What's the answer?" exploring different things, like the man in the cartoon, exploring all different things until he realizes, "I am the answer!"

... We have to learn from everybody. Every experience is a learning experience. Right now I feel that life is one long string of teachers. Everyone has made the way for me and I am making a way for others.

... What I have learned from life keeps changing. I won't say that I have learned anything. You learn a lot of things, like geometry or Spanish. I don't know that you can point in your life that you have learned anything, because the most important things you learn are always changing and developing and growing at every moment.

... There are lots of little rules like, 'Do unto others as you want them to do unto you' that are useful, until you grow to make your own. Those rules are for the beginning of growing up. They are not for tomorrow. You have to keep expanding and unfolding.

So when you write these rules in stone, they are not much of a use. The golden rule means one thing in Israel, one thing in Palestine, and one thing in Iraq. A golden rule has to grow and expand to cover each situation. You need to just know what needs to be done in each situation, which also changes in time.

... What I read last night is that wherever you go, enlightenment is right there. Whatever you do is enlightenment, if you are awake to it. It's a long way, looking back at the beginning, and you realize that you are who you are right under your nose. You have it right here.

... Just being alive and I guess expressing my Buddha Nature is what gives me joy and pleasure. I guess I love being alive and doing things and loving beauty, loving the things that seem to be part of me, and the fact that I can understand. And I love people with whom I can resonate. I love people who appreciate things that I think as beautiful and harmonious. I love music. Especially, I love to see people smile. I love to see people happy. I love to share beauty and happiness with others.

... My life has been about *feeling* the wholeness. Like when I look out the window at the marsh, I feel that this is me out there. I realize and know that this is the direction that I have been moving towards. Feeling what I intellectually believed to be true.

It's a peaceful feeling – more like when I am with the meditation group. I begin to feel that we are all one. The boundaries blend or soften; like my eyesight, where the boundaries are blurred. Things become more one thing. In the lunchroom there are all these people and sounds and I understand them as one thing.

Doing things with the Seniors for Peace, there's a feeling of being one with them. It's felt more than an intellectual exercise. There's more of a feeling of compassion. I feel compassion for all the people here - just compassion for the predicament of humanity.

... I have a belief in life, that it's a wonderful mystery that I can't understand, but I trust that there's something that holds life together. It's a wonderful mystery, because certainly everything is together. Everything is synchronized in a way – the universe, the planets, us - and I have more of a feeling of being with it all, more of a trust that I am an integral part of what I see and experience.

... It is a wonderful trip. It requires patience and it has taken me this long to wake up. I have no regrets as to how long this has taken, because it's all one moment anyway! I don't have to say, "If I only were awakened when I was in my thirties, forties, fifties, or whatever." It's such a pleasure now.



Doing her favorite work - Woodworking



Betty, in her 30s, building terraces at her Sausalito home

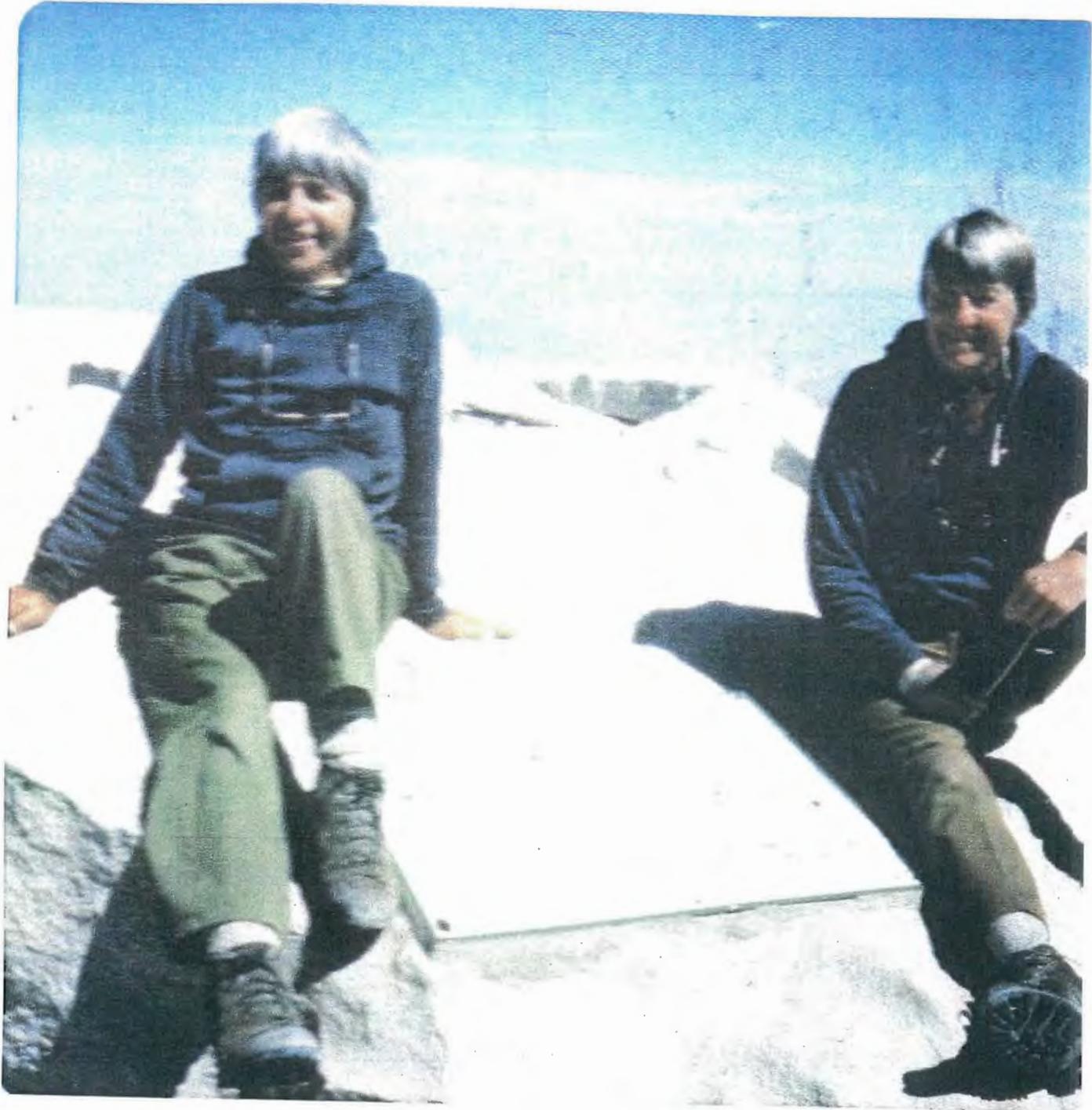




Pillar



Betty, 37 years old, with Rudy, at her Sausali-to home



Betty, 60 years old, with Rudy, on Mt. Whitney, CA.



Betty, 58 years old, with Jesse,
at the Sierras, CA.





Betty, 66 years old, with friends, at the Seven Gables, CA.



The front of the house in Sausalito

Betty built
the room at the
left



Betty's original house
for 53 years at
70 Rodeo Avenue
Sausalito

In
her garden





Betty, 38 years old, at her Sausalito home



In her living room, in preparation for a pre-quest meeting



Betty, 78 years old, with Marilyn and John
at their wedding, April 1995



Betty, 74 years old, with Vision Questers
in the Silurian Hills (S. Death Valley)
May 1991. Nitsa M., Betty's scribe
and muse is on the left.

...on Suzuki-roshi

... I had the privilege in knowing Suzuki-roshi and having a part in the beginning of the Zen Center in San Francisco. The early days were very important in the formation of the Zen Center. There was an incredible group of people there, very talented like:

- * Bill Kwong has established a monastery in Sonoma and has written a book, *No Beginning, No End*.
- * Richard Baker has established a monastery in Crestone, Colorado.
- * David Chadwick has written books about Suzuki-roshi, *Crooked Cucumber* and edited, *To Shine One Corner of the World*.
- * Ed Brown is a well-known writer of the Zen Cookbooks, *The Complete Tassajara Cookbook*, *Tassajara Bread Book*, and others.
- * And others have become artists, etc.

They are just very creative people. It was an extraordinary gathering of people who formed the Zen Center. They began things that were continued by others after Suzuki-roshi died. There was just such a creative energy in that group. It was a very creative time.

... Suzuki-roshi has always been with me, although I stopped going to the Zen Center after he died. As I sat he said to me, "Just sit." He's always been there saying, "Just sit!" And I have been sitting for the last 46 years.

Now I begin to feel what he meant. You learn it through your bones, because there are no answers that you can put into words. It's coming to peace, knowing that there are no answers. He said, "To find your composure in the midst of this ever changing life." To be able to find your composure, knowing that you will never know and never will - to find the peace in not knowing.

It's by practice, repeating the Prajna Paramita Mantra, bowing, and sitting day after day, for years, that it eventually got into my bones. That's why Suzuki-roshi said to just sit and eventually it gets into your bones. It takes a very long time.

... Bill Kwong called yesterday and talked about the old times and the sesshins. I think that Suzuki was rough with his first group of disciples, because he understood that they would be the foundation; that they would be the ones, who would establish Buddhism in the West; and that they had a real mission to perform.

So he gave us a bad time sometimes. In one sesshin he would go out of the door and we would be left alone for an hour or two and never know when he would come back. We trusted that what this training did for us was to have composure and to continue to sit even though we would not know when he would come back. We had to depend entirely on our will and not move.

Bill reminded me of all that and how we had to develop the will not to move, although we were dying from pain. It was a training that developed our strength to be Buddhists. So it really paid off, because the people in this class went off and studied and were able to become teachers.

He was a master of teaching us in unorthodox ways – something everyone in that group cherished. It was learning through our bones.

... Suzuki taught in the way that he didn't answer your questions. I had trouble, because you were supposed to count your breath. I found that if I counted my breath, it didn't behave. It became worse. If I concentrated on the breath it was either too fast or it just became unnatural. So I asked him about it and he looked at me, smiled with that twinkle in his eyes, and said, "Just sit." That was his answer!

There was another fellow who had an awful hard time learning to sit. He was tall and lanky and he would sit with his long legs crossed. He had to sit on three cushions. So after about five years, he finally got his knees down and he asked Suzuki, "I've been sitting for five years and my legs still hurt." And Suzuki said, "Oh?" You know? As if he had never heard how hard it was to sit.

He was very strict, especially with the men. In our zendo, there was a stick about a meter long; a handle on one end and it flattened to a blade on the other and about two inches wide. In the middle of the 45 minutes, someone would go around the room very slowly and if someone was in pain or slouching, either that person would get a little tap on the shoulder and then the person would bow, and then he would get hit on the shoulder with the flat end at a certain place that would relieve the tension. Your shoulders would get tense and a blow on your shoulder, in the right place, was very welcome.

... Perhaps it's a feeling of unity - a feeling of being one with everything. It's in one of the lectures in the second book of Suzuki's entitled, 'One with Everything.' I think that it's the one saying, to not make too many homemade cookies and bring them to him, because he was obliged to eat them. He was saying that one of his jobs was to eat those cookies! This woman was always making cookies. He was joking that he had come all the way from Japan in order to help eat all these homemade cookies! He

had a funny way of saying things to make the point. He had a wonderful sense of humor.

... I have a long belief that if it feels right to do something, then I do it, but not to be disappointed if it doesn't turn right. Suzuki says, "Life is like watching a movie." Just watch it and you are not upset, whether it goes this way or that way.

... You can't put real wisdom into words. A lot of it is just what we are doing. We learned a great deal just from Suzuki-roshi being present. His presence was teaching us. He didn't give us answers. He sort of pointed the way.

One of the stories is that when he was at Tassajara and he and a group of students were going to do work on a trail, they gathered some tools and walked up the hill and then they discovered that they had forgotten to bring the shovel. And so they sat there and had a conference about it and they suggested going without a shovel, or who was going to go back for the shovel, and so on, and pretty soon they missed Suzuki. He had disappeared. And then they looked down the trail and here he was coming up the trail with the shovel!

No conference, no discussion. Just go and get the shovel. It's just the way you do things. The way I do things is not the way somebody else will do things. Each one has to find one's own way of doing it.

... Something that Suzuki says is, "If you do something and you're proud of it and you think about it later, that is superfluous. That's something extra. You do something but not to think about how good it was."

... In all his teachings, you will find him saying, "This is so," and then later the opposite is so. For example, he would say that, "To meditate, much effort is needed." And then in another place he would say, "No effort is needed. The harder you try the farther you will get away from your goal." And then, "There's really nothing to know. Nothing to know."

... I have learned that I don't know and never will know. He says, "Not always so," which is also the title of his second book that things are not always the way that we think that they are. He said that you cannot be sure of anything and you must be wholly confident in your self – a paradox. Being confident, means that you have Buddha Nature and also that you will always be a beginner, which is the topic of his first book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

... If you ever thought that you knew something, it was, 'Not always so!' He would pull the rug out from under you, if you thought that you knew something.

... When I can't sleep, what I usually do is to get up and read a few pages from one of Suzuki-roshis' books. I read the section on calmness or transiency – one of those sections that address worry. Also I like the section called, 'Nirvana, the Waterfall.' It's about the Yosemite Falls. He compares the falls to nirvana.

He is considering the feeling of the water as it goes over the falls. You have to read it to see. It's very interesting that he thinks that the water has feelings. It does not have feelings until it separates into droplets. The river has composure, because it's one. But when the river is broken up going over the waterfall, it has feelings, because it's separate.

We think that we are separate human beings. So the only solution to that is to become one with everything. We are like the droplets of water going over the Yosemite Falls, but we can find our composure by joining the river below, becoming one with everything. That's all.

... Suzuki-roshi calls faith, *confidence*. You have to have confidence or trust in your Buddha Nature. When you act intuitively then you are acting or making a choice from the right place, which would be according to your Buddha Nature. And good choices lead to more good choices. For example, choosing to do his first class opened me up to more good choices.

... Last night I was reading in Suzuki's book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 118, 'But it is only within the evanescence of life that we can find the joy of eternal life.' I do not recall Suzuki using the word 'eternal' before. Perhaps when thinking of the Absolute aspect of things, time is meaningless. There is no beginning and no end. Things just is, as he liked to say.

... His books are so full of meaning. It will take years and years to take it all in. Sometimes I read something and I am surprised. Every day and every year you are a different person from the day or year before. One thing that you have skipped before, now you are finding how meaningful it is. Things register as something to take notice of, especially the last section in his book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

In that book I might have an idea of what I want to read and I skip around. In his other book, *not always so*, I read it consequentially; one section each night. Or if I wake up in the middle of the night and can't go to sleep, then I will read a part of that book.

... This morning I was reading in Suzuki's book, *not always so*, about problems. He says that you need just the right amount of problems. If you have too few problems, you would die. If you have too many problems, you would die. Buddha will see to it that you have the right amount of problems. The problems are gifts. You must appreciate your problems. You couldn't live without them.

... When I was studying with Suzuki, somebody asked him if he was enlightened and he said that one is already enlightened. So maybe we can say that enlightenment IS!

... Suzuki-roshi gave me a name in Japanese that translates in English, **The Light Breaking Through the Clouds**. So wait until the next moment to find out who you are. Find who you are and it will be different the next one. But you have the feeling that this is always me, this moment, the next, and the next, and so on.

... His lectures are a continual inspiration for me. I have read them more than one hundred times and gradually they have more significance for me now.

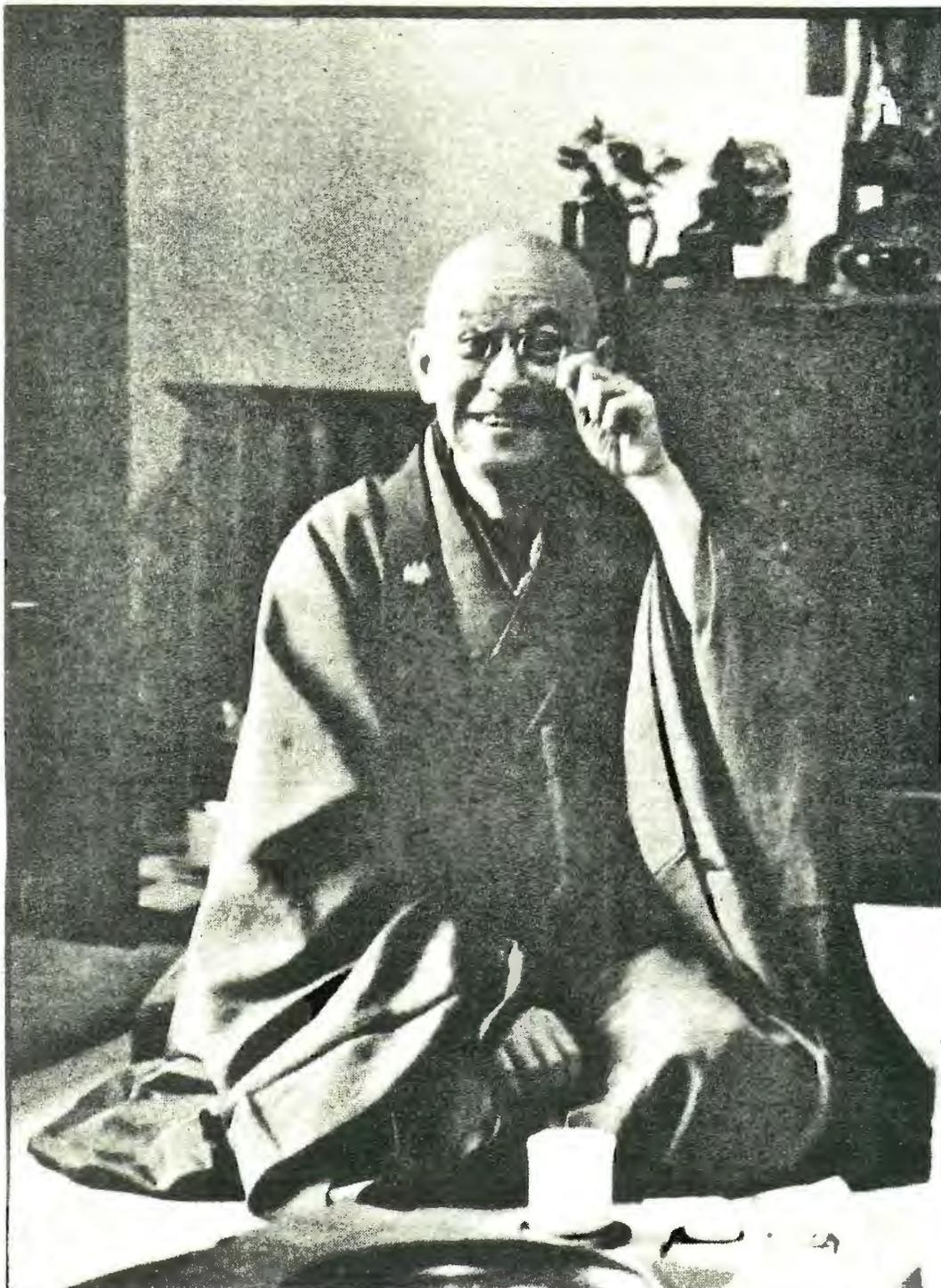
... All along I had confidence in Suzuki-roshi being the light. I must have had confidence in myself as well, but was not aware of it. I just had to trust what he said and just do it.

Now I have more confidence in my Buddha Nature, but you see, that is not mine either. I just trust that I am the universal. I am not something separate. The teacher awakens the universal in the student.



Suzuki-roshi (1971)

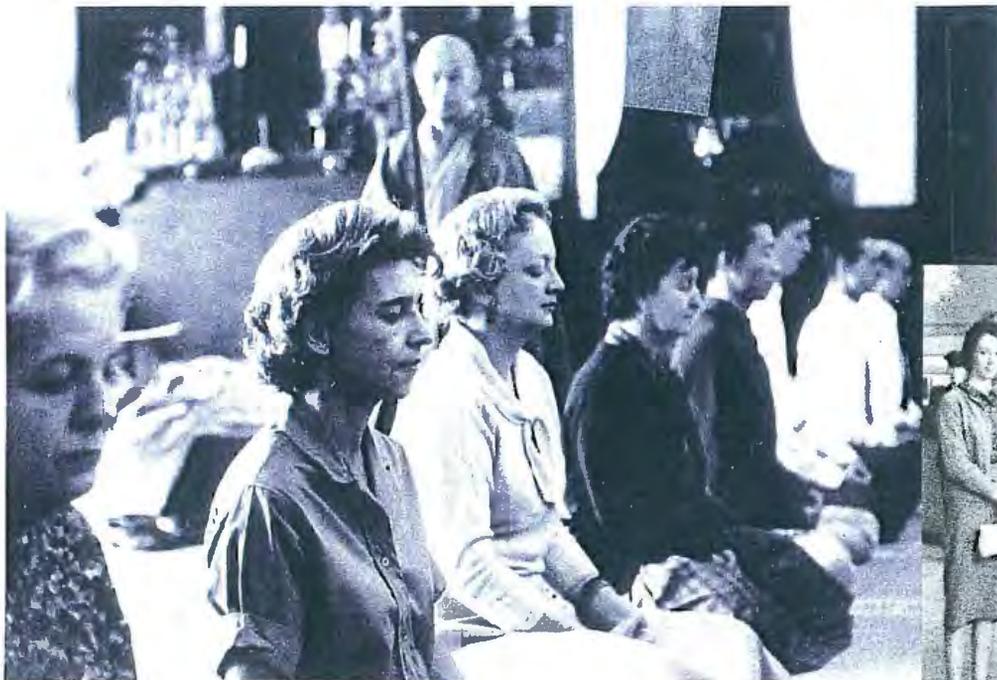
Life is like
stepping onto a boat
which is about to sail
out to sea and sink.
suzuki roshi



Betty's teacher Shunryu Suzuki-roshi at the
City Center in San Francisco, CA. c. 1970



Betty with the first students of Suzuki-roshi at the San Francisco Zen Center, CA.



Suzuki-roshi with stick. Left to right, Jean Ross, Betty, Connie Luick, Della Goertz, Bill Kwong, Grahame Petchey, Paul Anderson, Bob Hense (1961)



Suzuki-roshi and Mitsu Suzuki at the S. F. airport on their way to Japan (April 10, 1963) left to right, Virginia & Richard Be (with Sally), Betty, C. Luick, Mike Trudy Dixon, D. Goertz, G. Gua P. Petchey (with David)



Mitsu Suzuki, Suzuki Roshi's wife



Betty with Della Goertz, at Della's 80th
Birthdlay



Betty with Abbot Jakusho Kwong of the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center, Santa Rosa, and his wife

Betty's unfinished vakusu



Betty's mala beads

... on meditation and the Buddhist way

... [2003] At the Redwood's bulletin board I put up the following flyer as an introduction to my meditation classes.

“Meditation Group Introduction

Meditation differs from other activities: It is non-doing. There is no goal or reward to get, no progress to record. There is only a subtle knowing that this is the way to go. Please toss away any expectations or pre-conceived notions of what it should be like. You sit just to sit.

There are many different forms, practiced for ages, in all parts of the world, including concentration on the breath, a word, a phrase, an object, or a pattern of action such as walking, dancing, drumming, yoga, tai chi. Musicians, artists, and fine performers find their inspiration in meditation. Even nature meditates: observe a cat purring, a tree swaying in the breeze, a mountain enduring.

Meditation is experiencing the present moment, as you meditate and also as you carry out the activities of everyday life. It is becoming a whole human being. It is becoming peace.

Can anyone meditate? Yes, if you can breathe, persevere in your intention, and are willing to set aside a small, but regular time for practice. The power lies within each of us. You don't need special tapes of music. Observe your self. There will be times of realization and times of confusion. Never mind. Trust. Do not judge. You are ok. They are ok, too. Patience! Relax and let your self go into the stillness.

It is very important to meditate with others. We are not alone, we 'inter-be' with all other beings. So whether you are a novice or an experienced practitioner of any tradition, please come – we are all beginners!”

... For my meditation class, I take a stool and I put a white scarf over it and I put the bell on it and we all sit in a circle. We have been studying the self – the habit that we have in relating everything to the self. For example, when you say that, “I have...” you don't realize the implication of always wanting more.

I tell people in my meditation class to ignore the monkey mind, because it never goes away. Sometimes they will feel peace and calmness, like having a blanket around them. They should ignore any outside noises or inside ones. They have to fold over them and not be disturbed by them.

The thoughts will come and go like clouds and be able to remain calm despite it all.

... The meditation classes are so important to me, because I learn something about the meditation way of life - so I can pass it along to a few people around me, who seem to enjoy it and make sense out of it. This way I am becoming more spiritual and more intensely aware of my everyday life.

We are using Jon Kabat-Zinn's book, *Wherever You go, There You Are*, from which we read a couple of pages each time and discuss a topic, relating it to our own feelings, how it is relevant to our lives, and how we feel about it. We might get away from it, but they make meditation their own.

And then we meditate about twenty minutes and I am not fussy about their posture, because people in their 80s or 90s are not about to improve or learn a new posture. At the end, someone might get an insight and we might talk about it. All the meditators are peace-loving people, so we talk a lot about peace.

... Concerning meditation within a group and doing it by your self, I have observed the following. There's an energy sitting with other people, which is greater than sitting on your own. When you meditate in a group it reinforces the understanding that you are meditating for everyone. So the main focus or purpose is a regard for all sentient beings. Well, Suzuki-roshi says, "Not always so." So you can't make rules for your self. Circumstances are so varied.

We say that six people can be quieter than one. There's a depth of quiet that is greater with a group than if you were meditating on your own. There's quiet and then there's Quiet.

... It's the togetherness that's important - sharing our questions and our attempts to answer those questions - that's producing an energy, which makes people feel good. They feel that they are not alone. They feel that other people have those same questions and that there is a sharing of understanding. So we go into different topics, like for example, we explored the idea of right and wrong.

... In having a meditation practice, they always say that you should have a sangha - a community that you practice with. That's one of those things that you do not understand what it's doing to you - like the learning through your bones. The presence of others makes a big difference. What living in The Redwoods has done for me is remarkable. It has socialized me.

... The meditation classes are going ok. And what I am finding out and getting to, is that in meditation you don't try to relate to other things. You have to become them. One student asked me how to paint flowers and I said that when you are painting a flower, you must become the flower. You don't relate to the flower. Relating indicates that you are here and the flower is there. Much deeper than that, is to become the flower as you paint it. Relating denotes separation from that which you are relating to.

There is a Buddhist story about the Buddha lecturing to a crowd and then he held up a flower to the gathering. Only one disciple got it. He understood the significance of that action. And this one disciple felt that he was the flower. The story is not explained. Just the action of holding the flower up and this disciple was enlightened. I don't know the story enough to explain it. It's a well-known story. The disciple must have understood that he was one with the flower. And the artist understands this, but he or she does not know exactly what it is.

In meditation you have to do something similar. You have to become the whole. And you become the whole cosmos by just sitting, or painting a flower, or listening to music, or composing a piece and performing it, or swimming, or doing something that you really love. If you do it totally and completely, where you forget your little self, you then become the whole. You become enlightened. You are one with the whole universe. But that's a bit difficult.

... **[May 24, 2005]** I have not been feeling too energetic. So I finally decided to stop both of my meditation classes. Several weeks ago I stopped the afternoon class and combined the two classes together. But the person who was going to come to the morning class has not been coming so I decided it was time to stop. I don't have the energy anyway. I am not feeling so perky.

I have been thinking about it for some time now as I have been feeling more tired. It's been over two years that these classes have been going. It's quite remarkable. People here have been getting older, more frail, and have been having more medical problems. It's the right time.

So I have found it very valuable for my own meditation practice. I spent so many years meditating alone. I should be meditating with others. So the classes did that for me. There was an energy being together – a togetherness. It was very important to me. Although they were not Buddhists, or had any experience in meditation, we were together and that made a big difference, especially in my own meditation. It became somehow more real and deeper.

The good thing is that there is woman in the class who is willing to become the leader and continue with one meditation class. I think that's wonderful, because I get to continue being with that group energy!

... And so let's talk about *practice*. The word practice is about getting better and better and working towards a goal and also working harder and harder. That is the usual idea of practice. So by working harder you keep improving your self for whatever the goal is. But this is not the idea of Buddhist practice.

You probably won't find this idea even in Suzuki-roshi's lectures. It's not this idea of getting better and better. It's something that happens to you as you practice. Practice has a subconscious affect on you and when you study or practice Buddhism, you are told to sit, walk, and bow this way. You don't get an explanation of what all this is about. This is a subliminal and unconscious way of teaching the things that cannot be expressed in words.

If you had a teacher and you had an interview with him, he would communicate some things without words and he would know what you understood without explaining it. It is where the teacher and the student just sit and the teacher stares at the student and understandings are transmitted without words.

... The bowing is very important. I bow seven times. I cannot bow kneeling down. I can only bend over. Like when I bow in the morning, before I meditate, I bow to Suzuki-roshi's picture, but it's really bowing to everyone who lived on this planet – one long parade of everyone that's gone before me on this planet.

So I bow in spirit. It's the feeling of bowing and knowing who you are. You are bowing to your self in a way. You are greeting the day. You are greeting your self, as you are moving in this day. And this day stretches from now to the end, except there is no beginning and no end, because there is no time. Who I am, includes all space and all time and it's when I bow in the morning, that is when I feel it the most.

All this can only be communicated non-verbally. You don't do these things in order to understand. You just begin to understand after you have been doing them for a while.

... Like I have said numerous times, the act of bowing has significance. You can only do it and you get some understanding. As you practice, as you do the various things like chanting, reciting the sutras, bowing, meditating, and maybe sitting on a pillow - which eventually becomes a

most wonderful experience of balance – they have an underlying effect that you can't explain, but it is cumulative.

It's a little bit how you train a pet animal. You lead the puppy through certain motions and eventually, the puppy learns to do these things and it's only by leading them through it that they get it. You don't have to sit down and explain to a puppy why it has to do certain motions. That's how practice is. No explanation is given. You have to have confidence in your self and your teacher and go on blind faith and you just do it.

... Your everyday life is your practice too. Whatever you do is your practice, especially doing it with mindfulness and awareness. This is very difficult to do, because you cannot be mindful all the time. The more you become mindful, the less you are trying to be mindful. You just is. It's a natural thing, like a child playing.

... The Prajna Paramita is very important. I have been saying it every morning and every night for years and the meaning is sinking in more and more. I don't do it in rote. Eventually, meaning and insights break through. What it is actually doing, beyond the words, is describing the Absolute. Slowly, it sorts of sinks in. I am so glad that I have been reciting that every day. It's been very helpful.

... "The Maha Prajna Paramita, which is the Supreme Wisdom Heart Sutra, goes like this:

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva practicing deep Prajna Paramita
 Clearly saw that all five conditions are empty
 Thus was relieved from all suffering and fear.
 O Shariputra, form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no
 other than form;
 Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form;
 Sensation, perception, discrimination, awareness, are likewise like
 this.
 O Shariputra, all dharmas are forms of emptiness, not born,
 not destroyed, not tainted, not pure, without gain, without
 loss;
 So in emptiness, there is no form, no sensation, perception,
 discrimination, awareness;
 No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind;
 No color, sound, smell, taste, touch, phenomena
 No realm of sight and so forth until no realm of consciousness
 No ignorance, and no extinction of it, and so forth until no old age
 and death and extinction of them;
 No suffering, no cause of suffering, no extinguishing, no path, no
 wisdom and no gain.

With nothing to attain, the Bodhisattva lives Prajna Paramita
 With no hindrance in the mind, there is no hindrance, therefore no
 fear exists:

Far beyond deluded thoughts, this is Nirvana.

All past, present, and future Buddhas live Prajna Paramita

And therefore, attain Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi!

Therefore know, Prajna Paramita is the great mantra, is the great
 bright mantra, is the supreme mantra, is the unsurpassable
 mantra

It is capable of relieving all suffering. This is true, not false.

So proclaim the Prajna Paramita Mantra,

Proclaim this mantra, and say:

Gate! Gate! Paragate! Parasamgate!

Bodhi! Svaha! Prajna Heart Sutra.

This mantra describes emptiness, which is indescribable. The last two
 lines: Gone! Gone! Real Gone! Gone to the Other Shore (Nirvana)!
 Buddha! All Hail! Wisdom Heart Sutra. A Bodhisattva is one whose first
 concern is helping others to awaken. Gate is pronounced Ga-te.

And I add a little prayer of my own. I say:

I give thanks for this day

Though it may be my last.

I shall live it fully in the Here and Now

With joy in all the beauty, the pleasure, and the pain;

With gratitude for this incredible gift of consciousness;

With trust in the Great Spirit that dwells within

Each creature, animal, plant, and landscape;

With love and compassion for myself and all my relations,

My fellow travelers on this journey of wonders.

May we all awaken!

With Gassho - meaning a little bow, palms together - as greeting or
 thanks. I usually abbreviate the last lines and instead say:

With joy

With gratitude

With trust

With love for all creation”

... Being the sutra, is like going into the emptiness. We are not separate
 from anything in the world. It's to become more one with the Heart
 Sutra, because the sutra itself is emptiness. But emptiness, you can't
 explain.

Maybe emptiness is nirvana. But then what's that? It's to be one with it. Somewhere in the sutra it says, 'With no hindrance in the mind.' There's something in your mind that keeps you from understanding emptiness. It's the idea of separateness. When you become one with everything then you will have no hindrance in the mind. Until you become free from this hindrance, this separateness, you will keep coming and going. You are always in flux.

Everything is transient. You don't learn how to become one with everything. You have to learn it in every moment. In one breath, inhaling, you are very much alive. When you exhale, you fade into emptiness. So with every breath you take, you are either fading into emptiness, or you come back alive.

... [For Jakusho Kwong Roshi's 60th Birthday Celebration in 1995, Betty wrote]

"Even in the early 1960s it was clear that the young Bill Kwong was destined to become a great teacher. The newly formed Zen Center of San Francisco was holding a 7-day sesshin at Sokoji. Bill was Cook. I was Cook's helper. It was time for breakfast, late in the week, and Bill was toasting rice crusts in the oven, crusts he had saved from our evening meals. I asked, "Shall I put milk on the table?" (We usually served milk with our morning cereal). Bill answered firmly: "No. Hot water." I grumbled a bit silently: Rice crusts? No milk to wash them down? However, I dutifully set pots of hot water on the table.

The group of meditators entered, bowed, and took their seats. I too sat down, and as I poured hot water on my rice crusts, my eyes filled with tears and I was overwhelmed by a great wave of gratitude. I had rice crusts and hot water! I was the most blessed person in the world. The universe provided for my every need! Rice crusts and hot water! How could I want anything more? Tears continued to stream down my cheeks as I happily ate the most meaningful meal of my life, and gave thanks for Bill's simple lesson."

... We don't know where or what the truth is, because it's continually changing and you are continually changing, making it very hard to recognize the truth as such. Every minute it appears fresh. There's no beginning and no end to it. You are the center of the universe and so is everybody else and that's why we bow to each other, because we recognize the Buddha Nature in the other.

... Everything changes all the time. So there cannot be an abiding self. Transiency, in Suzuki-roshi's book, says that everything is constantly changing. There's no abiding self. The idea of transiency is also the idea of selflessness, without a separate self. The self is your whole existence

and by existence, Suzuki does not mean something that exists permanently, but something that is and is not at the same time.

... In my meditation I am much more one with everything. I understand how you can be one with everything and still be detached. I am more appreciative of this gift of life and I am realizing that the treasure is not yours until you give it away.

And I am beginning to understand that, because in these years of teaching those meditation classes to the Vision Questers, giving of myself in that way, I have come to this deeper understanding of meditation. And the treasure that I have given away is coming back to me tenfold. And then the treasure becomes me. These are things that I have said for years, especially during the Vision Quest about giving away of your self. So it's a kind of understanding of what I have been saying years ago.

... Meditation is for people who are ready to find stillness inside - to be the stillness. Not everybody is ready for that, because there's no goal in meditation. As you practice, you somehow feel more with what's going on and you learn to take your problems in stride. There's a t-shirt that Marilyn gave me that has the picture of a cat on a rainbow over sharp mountain peaks or edges and it has the following caption, 'Zen cat rides a rainbow over the rough edges of the world.'

... For me, meditation is a whole new way of being. It has helped me realize how to bring the spiritual and everyday life together. For many years I have been meditating alone. So now, I am bringing the spiritual, the everyday activity, and activism together.

... Meditation is letting go - one thing after another - even the desire to let go. Then perhaps the calmness will come, embracing the All.

... In meditation there's no place to get to. You are here, right now, today, this moment. That's what meditation is all about. In your meditation there's no place to get to. To ask any questions or be involved in your mind is beside the point. You must have to go along and not to worry about getting anyplace.

... What the Buddhist monk does is that when he eats, he eats; when he sleeps, he sleeps; when he plays, he plays; and when he practices, he practices. So you have to pay attention how the monkey mind wants to distract you from your practice.

And in general, don't switch from one thing to another without intention. You have to be discerning, whether it's your monkey mind or your deeper self. As you practice you become more and more clear. Just following

your changing whims is not doing the inspiring thing. With practice, you become confident in your Big Mind, and you act accordingly.

... In some sense, meditation is a sort of a peripheral vision thing. You don't look directly at it, just around the edges. I can't see the toothpaste and getting the right amount on the toothbrush. So I let my peripheral vision see it coming out of the tube. I can't look directly to the end of the tube, because I can't focus. But if I use my peripheral vision then I can see how much toothpaste goes on the toothbrush.

This is something you can see like you have peripheral vision. Not focusing on it, but instead letting it come into your spiritual peripheral vision. But you have to know that you don't have a separate self.

... No improvement. We are not about improving ourselves. Zen says, 'I do not know.' There's no special self that we have to improve upon, but we become part of everything. We are completely dissolved. As parts of everything have come together, that's how we will dissolve and become parts of everything.

... I had a long meditation this morning. Have you read Thich Nhat Hanh on his concept of interbeing? That's the key to understanding. It means that you are not only determined by the genes in your body. You also contain all the elements in life, the Universe. You are sunshine. You are not perceiving only sunshine. You have the element of sunshine within you. All of these things are present here. You are the sunshine, the water, the sun, the moon, and the stars. You have all these elements and you exist, because all of them exist within you. It's sort of overwhelming when you begin to understand it.

I am beginning to read this again. Thich Nhat Hanh has a book on the Heart Sutra. It takes the sutra line by line and it explains it with the concept of interbeing. Interbeing becomes a more personal concept. You *are* interbeing. You are that. He says, "I am here because you are here." This is also what Suzuki-roshi means by saying, "To see things as they is."

So rereading it now is meaningful. It's hard to understand for example, the idea of what are things empty of. Empty of what? They are empty of an idea of an abiding self or empty of a separate self.

The Heart Sutra is just one koan after another. And having it with you is what gradually changes you or helps you in your understanding. But you have to do the living too. In some place, Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Your life is a work of art."

... It's a feeling of completion, peace, and clarity. It's very much like the feeling that everything is exactly the way it's supposed to be – nothing more, nothing less. That's very much the feeling. I don't have to get up and change the world, although I go every Friday and protest at the corner. I have to be part of it, but it's all the way that it's supposed to be.

... The more one sits and tries to see things as they is, one then senses the awe, the beauty, and the love of the whole of scheme of things. You just see more and you appreciate more of what life is really about. You see it all at once.

It's getting deeper and more inclusive. Often a bird flies out and back from the roof here – just the whole complexity of life that this represents. It's all filled with water and sunshine and you see more and more of it.

... There is a Zen story that I want to share with you. Someone asks a monk, "What is Buddha Nature?" And the monk answered, "A pound of beans." It was what he was holding in his hands at the time! It's whatever you have in your hand or mind in the present moment. That's what he was doing in the present moment.

... Existence is all there is. There is nothing beyond existence or non-existence. It's the same thing. Now you see it and now you don't. Little kids delight in the hide and seek game, because it denotes exactly that experience.

We have to work to loosen the attachments that hold us to an individual person or thing – the phenomenal world. The way to loosen the attachments is by transforming this love for the individual or a cause, into a deeper compassion that encompasses all existence. We have to see things as they is. So by seeing things as they is, then eventually you will see that everything is a whole. It is one.

... It's also about loving kindness - to be able to see holistically. In order to love those you hate, you have to think holistically, not judgmentally. Loving-kindness is unconditional, because you see from all sides.

Experientially, you have to see the problem or the question from all sides at once. For example, let's take President Bush. You have to see him in his context, how he developed, and how he sees his God. You have to see all of this in the context in the world. See him as is.

You have to see all people as your self. Loving-kindness begins by loving your self and gradually it will radiate to others. You definitely have to start with you. You are worthy and worthy to receive love and it's quite a

trick to love your self, because you put your self as a doer and a receiver at the same time. So it's a gymnastic feat.

You love the Buddha Nature in you and all that you love becomes one, because everything is Buddha Nature. You, others, and everything are one. So then you are able to, 'See things as they is.'

... The word *composure* is used a lot in Suzuki-roshi's teachings. It's to be able to have composure in your meditation. It's a feeling of being composed, which is beyond any worries or pains. In meditation you can come to a state of being composed, regardless of any conditions that may distract you, any worries, pains, thoughts, etc.

Composure is just a quality of peace that settles over you. It is a feeling that everything is all right; that you are fine, not only with your self, but also with the universe. You are feeling put together – composed - that you are one with everything. He uses it quite a bit, describing how you might feel in meditation.

The word itself means put together – being one with everything. Things are not separate. So in meditation you are not separate. You are the whole. You are one. There's nothing outside your self. It's amazing how he has chosen words to convey his understanding. I don't know how Suzuki-roshi acquired the English language, but the words that he uses express his intention perfectly.

... **[May 5, 2005]** Composure is about not to be perturbed by anything that goes on - to be able to sit there, while the walls are collapsing around you. It's like the evanescence in every day life. This is nirvana, where you find composure and tranquility. It's like that little poem that I included in the letter about the pope:

A pope is dead
 A baby is born
 The sun moon and stars
 Pursue their pattern
 Unperturbed

It just sort of came to me, because of what is going on. It's like, the universe proceeds without any consideration of all these great events in our life.

... And then we have evanescence, which is the quality of disappearance. Life as a flower has a very short, but a very beautiful life. It's the quality of not lasting very long and that things have a very short life. It's beautiful, because you have to appreciate it only this moment. The

present moment is all the more wonderful, because you have to appreciate it now, before it vanishes. Existence is a very short and tenuous sort of thing.

... So the longer we live, the more obscure things get, or the mystery deepens. There's more freedom. Not the Republican kind. I've been pretty consistent this way for many years. The mystery will never get solved, only living more comfortably with it.

... My practice is getting deeper. I feel it more. It is not only an exercise. I feel that the Prajna Paramita is loaded with significance and each phrase seems to be unfolding. I feel it more. It is not an understanding. It seems that it's more like a part of me. My understanding is expanded more. I feel peaceful.

[For more information on Suzuki-roshi and Betty's life with the sangha and the Zen Center, please refer to www.cuke.com and check David Chadwick's interview with her]

... on political activism

"A paper

**A College Activist Goes Home
January 14, 1997**

... "A young woman stood near the college campus gate, handing out leaflets about a peace meeting. Daily, I watched her. I was a naïve freshman, preoccupied with the problem of handling a full academic program while earning enough money to survive. This was in the 1930s, long before the present era of huge student loans (and debts), and the crippling costs of higher education that shut out so many impecunious youths today.

I took a leaflet, and struck up a conversation with my new acquaintance. I began to see that there was a very real world out there beyond academia where terrible forces of 'good' and 'evil' were colliding, crushing the poor and helpless. Young Davids were challenging the Goliaths of money and power. My own ambitions appeared insignificant in the light of the suffering of humanity. Here was work to be done, a public to be enlightened by the truth, and bold actions to be taken toward these ends. I became a 'campus radical.'

As I entered into the peace movement, life took on a new meaning. Although I continued my academic work, my passion was for political action. I was learning to devote myself to a higher cause, to work without reward, to take risks, to love beyond my immediate circle, to see myself as a citizen of the world.

In due time, I finished my degree and teaching credential requirements, and focused on my teaching career. But there was always a call to action: a peace march; writing in favor of protecting the environment and endangered species; working in my community to stop pollution, toxic pesticides, nuclear power and nuclear weapons; and standing up for justice and human rights.

My attention was now drawn inward and I became aware that my activism had opened a door into the vast realm of spirituality. I studied meditation. The Outer and the Inner were coming together. Nature was no longer something separate from myself – it was myself. It was not to be comprehended through TV documentaries or comfortable motor tours,

but by whole body and soul immersion, as in backpacking and living simply in the wilderness.

Now, everything seems miraculous and sacred: people, plants, animals, the landscapes, cycles, and forces that comprise this living planet Gaia. I see my life as a vision quest and an opportunity to perhaps ease the suffering of my companions on the Way.

If you would find your self, first lose your self in some work or action that manifests your deepest love. Your action may help others find their path. Follow your heart – it knows the way Home.

The young woman at the college campus gate has been a life-long friend. Many, many years later she is still an activist for peace and justice, a whole and loving human being. I wonder if she knows how many others like me she has inspired.”

... I put up little notices on the bulletin board that said that the real news is on KPFA, which is a free speech station. It's very important to know, so I wrote: KPFA at such and such an hour, and I put a little plastic bag of these notices under the bigger sign and said to please take these. And I signed my name at the bottom of the page.

And one person came a couple of months ago, who was a KPFA fan, looked and saw my name and telephoned me. We have a roster that tells us of all the phones here. So she phones me and said that she'd like to meet me. So we've been together on the political review group.

... At The Redwoods I'm helping organize a meeting with the League of Women Voters about the California ballot propositions on the next election **[2004]**; and another meeting with someone from the local office of our good Congresswoman, Lynne Woolsey, on the political situation. Another project is that we may begin an evening peace vigil.

... **[September 5, 2004]** I actually listened to President Bush's speech and he promises everything to everybody. It's amazing. It's an Alice in Wonderland thing. We can't be worked up about this, because everything changes, otherwise our lives won't have any meaning. We can't know beyond today. So you live in the moment.

When we go out and demonstrate we can't even hope to win. We go out and hold up our light to shine, because that's what we do today. So the world goes on. This is what I have to do right now. This is like meditation.

... I don't have confidence in anything only life and existence. I don't have a specific confidence that if I do this, that will happen. I guess I have confidence that my Buddha Nature, life itself, will sustain me. When it comes to a specific outcome, then everything will go the way that it's supposed to go.

So I think that in the long run, enough people coming together with a positive attitude, is a good thing. But we might not see the result of our actions in our lifetime or even in the lifetime of our children.

... There was a big event last week. The high school was protesting the army recruiters on their campus and we had a protest every morning as well. They asked us to demonstrate with them. We were out there with them on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, from 7:30 until 8 in the morning. We were protesting in our usual place.

It was the meeting of the youngsters and the elders! We had their signs too. This is very interesting, because for two and a half years the high school kids had seen us demonstrating and they knew what to do when they got angry with the recruiters. I feel that we had an influence or we educated them what to do.

... We were given an award of \$5,000 from the community for the peace work that we have been doing here at The Redwoods. It's a wonderful award and we can decide what we want to do with the moneys. The staff here is very supportive of us. There is a favorable climate that does not exist in too many establishments.

There are leaders who are coming up, though there is especially one who is emerging as the leader and her sight is really bad, but she manages to call on us by our names. I am a steady worker. The right people come together at the right time.

It's interesting that during my freshman year of college, I went to anti-war demonstrations and I am still going since then. It's been a thread in my life. My last stop is going to peace demonstrations once a week at the corner here!

... So the story goes that one Friday it was pouring rain and the leader of our Seniors for Peace group went to check to see if anybody was there, and here I was sitting in the rain holding a sign. And she asked me, "What are you doing here in the rain?" So I just said, "It's Friday. I have to be out here. I have to do this. This is what I do on Fridays rain or shine. That's what I do on Fridays." Because of my experiences in the back packing trips, my belief is that you go on your trip, rain or shine.

So I continued to sit for the hour and not take the suggestion to go in. And I find that it did have some affect. After that people came out in the rain, whenever there was rain. And so it did encourage people. You never know the impact that your actions can have.

... At the demonstrations, in general, I can't move and when it's windy, then I have a problem. I just sit there. I guess my meditation practice helps, because I can sit there without moving. It's very noisy. There's a guitar player and four or five drummers. What I mostly feel is a great pleasure of being with like-minded people.

Going to the demonstration is like doing meditation. There's no gain in it either. My action is not determined by hope to effect the elections. I can only state my position. It's my Buddha Nature, but I don't know how my Buddha Nature can take sides. I don't have expectations that this is going to work or something, because expectations always disappoint us. You do what you need to do and not because of an assurance of something.

... There's this engaged Buddhism, to not only let things take their course, but there's also the way of action. You decide to take the course that is going to best benefit life and joy. What's the pro-life decision that will bring harmony and peace? Going to war is not a life promoting action.

Each individual makes his or her decision on that, whether it's life promoting or destructive and having to evaluate each situation. You can't make one plan deciding that all situations are the same. So my way of deciding is that I decided that peace is something to work for, without considering whether we are going to win or not.

It's like the coming election **[2004]**. Don't think that you are going to win. Instead, put your energy into what needs to be supported or promoted. It might be generations before your view will be the prevailing one.

I hope that people will devote themselves to a sustainable society where peace is possible and where people live in harmony with the natural world and with each other. Meanwhile, you simply must promote peace within your self, while you work for peace in the world. It's not something that you win forever. It's something that needs continual work.

... I express my attitude about peace. I am not working to win this battle. I am not aiming for a specific goal. I am simply standing up and saying that peace is it. It's my nature. In history there are people who stand up for unpopular causes but you have to stand up for who you are, because you do not know how down the line you might affect somebody. So it's

not a disappointment that we loose this battle, but we need to stand up for who we are.

There is a paradox here. You have to fulfill your nature acting as an individual, but also understanding that you are part of a whole, without a separate self. So your life is paradoxical, because you are with all your energy going into acting in what you believe in and at the same time knowing that you have no separate self.

... The major theme of mine is peace. I began my activism way back in the 40s against fascism and now I have a deeper understanding what it means. The Gandhi figure that we have at our demonstrations holds a placard that says, 'In order to have the social change that you desire, you have to personally become it' - to live peace.

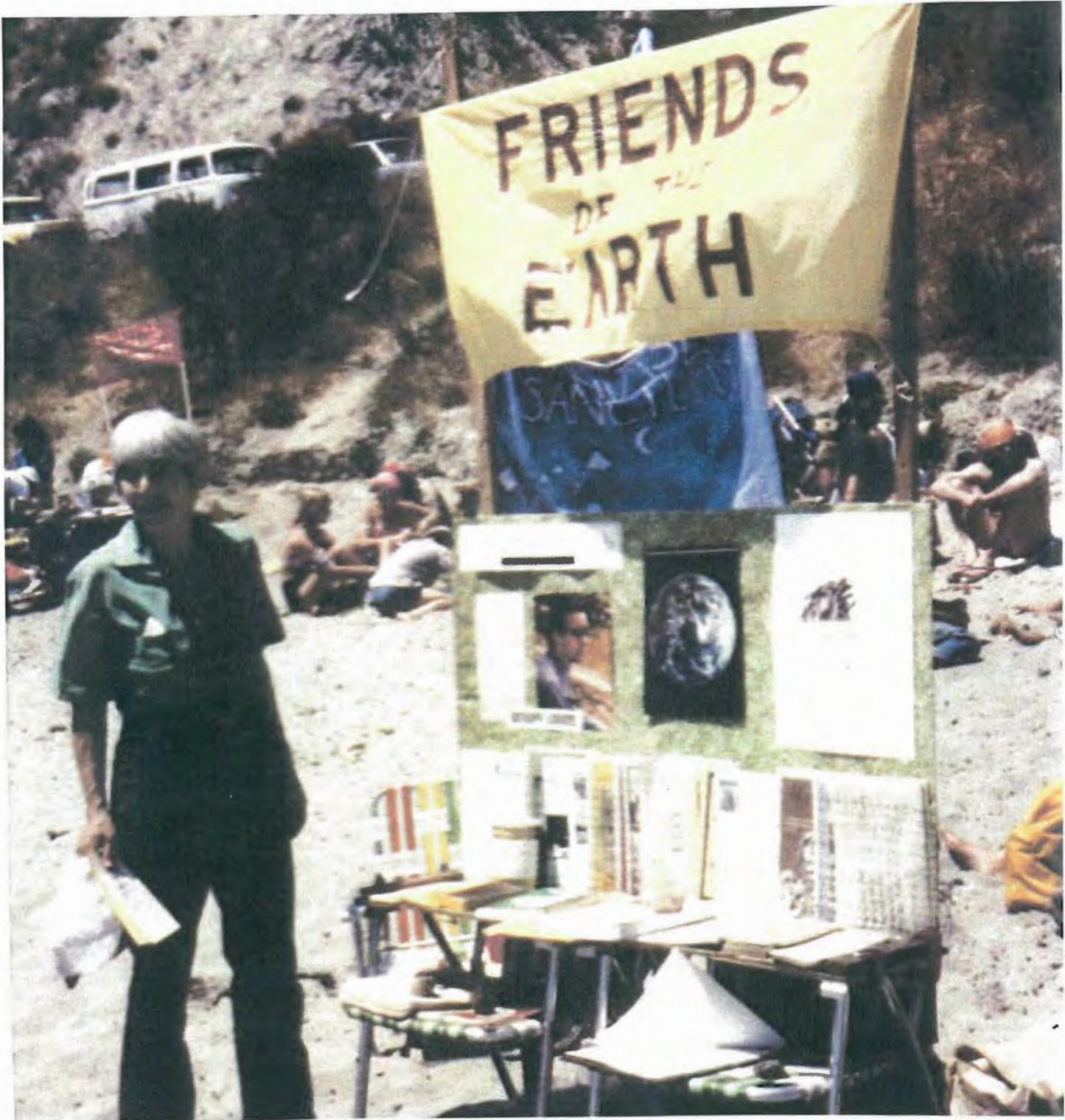
So it has deeper implications for your self. Everyday you live peace, every single day. You might be at war with your self so you start right here, by accepting your self. Meditation is a way to come to peace with your self.

... I still go to the weekly demonstration. It's the high point of my week. I think that I have been to more demonstrations than anybody else.

... There is a funny cartoon about a possible nuclear holocaust. There are these two blobs of blue green algae and one turns to the other and says, "Oh, my. Now we have to start all over again." And the other sighed and said, "This time let's leave out the brains!"



Betty, 68 years old, at a 4th of July Peace demonstration



Betty, 63 years old, volunteering with the Friends of the Earth, CA



Friday afternoon Peace
Demonstration with the
'Seniors for Peace'
at The Redwoods



... on music

[Written on index cards]

... “My favorite CDs are:

1. Bach, Mass in B (flat) minor – the Heavens ring out!
2. Beethoven Sonata #29 piano. Wilhelm Kempff only – utterly sublime and sheer madness!
3. Schubert: Quintet in C Major – profound!
4. Mahler: Song of the Earth – Das Lied. Bruno Walter – the earth continues its eternal journey as mankind struggles with its joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears.

Music has many functions: it entertains, it is fun, and it is an art. It is a companion in our play, our work, and our every day life. Music raises our spirits, bolsters our courage, and comforts our grief or fears. It is never still, but always changing.

Serious music is the expression of the composer’s outlook on life, his or her vision of the deeper reality that underlies all existence. It is the Mystery made audible. Music simply IS.

Music is like meditation: something you do just for the experience of doing it. There is no reason, no logical meaning. Just surrender to the beauty of the sound...with your total attention. Relax, do not move, and disappear. Become the sound. It is a form of non-doing = meditation.

Approach a new composition with a sense of wonder – not with the intent of judging it good or bad, pleasing or not. Let your self be open to a new experience, let it open new doors...

Perfection

Rarely if ever do we find perfection in this life. It is only through the imperfect that we glimpse perfection. If we are too judgmental and reject all that is imperfect we will be very, very poor. Because of our own imperfections we are perfect human beings.

So with music, relax and listen deeply. You will be rewarded with perfection in the imperfect. A fine performance can shine through a not-so-great recording.

I can only truly listen for about 1 hour, one CD per day, with total attention. 'Background' music is lost when accompanying other activities or chores.

Approach a new composition with a sense of wonder – not with the intent of judging it good or bad, pleasing or not. Let your self be open to a new experience, let it open new doors. Music can be Letters from Emptiness.

If you can, try to set aside a time – an hour just for music – 1 hour – 1 CD when you do nothing else – accomplish nothing tangible – rest completely – be refreshed – **JUST BE MUSIC.**

About perfection, Suzuki-roshi says, "In the imperfection of daily life you discover eternal perfection."

... Music is. I am just really learning to fully appreciate it, to really hear it. Maybe it's like when you see a fine painting, it means something to you. Music has a different language. It is its own language and I am becoming more aware of it now - having more of an understanding of it.

... Music expresses every possible emotion and aspect of life. It's just another way of understanding life. We try to approach the mystery in many different ways; the artist through the visual; the musician through sound; the dancer through movement; the philosopher through thinking; and the meditator through meditation.

I have been seriously listening to music since the late 40s when I came back from teaching in the country. It's just now that I begin to see that it's not only fascinating, but that it's part of the mystery.

... When I was living in Sausalito and looking over the bay, there was an old barge there that had some painted words that said: LOVE IS. Eventually, it was taken away. Love is. By loving music I think that I know what love is.

I guess that Mahler's *Song of the Earth* is somewhat connected to that. Through the years it has meant love to me. Sometimes it was a love of a person and now it has grown more deeply – not only the love of a person, but of the earth, humankind. It also includes sorrow.

Humankind is caught between a deep love and a deep sorrow that vanishes. Love in the phenomenal world vanishes. You love perhaps a person or something beautiful like the earth, life, being, and yet under this love you know that it's all evanescence. It's the bittersweet quality of life.

It's a deep part of my life. It's the picture of transformation. The interesting thing is that the meaning of music for me now has been transformed to deeper levels. When I was younger, it meant that my love of nature and people was much more self-centered and undeveloped. It was a self-centered love. And now my love is more universal. It is deeper.

The meaning of this piece has changed through the years. It's sort of the story of my life. My view is much more hopeful, peaceful, and beautiful. It's not dismal. It's merging with emptiness. It has a profound effect on me.

... In my meditation yesterday a certain piece of music came into my mind and I experienced this piece of music very intensely. It was so intense that an extra hour seemed to disappear during this meditation. It was Schubert's *Quintet in C major*.

It's such a profound piece of music. It touches a part of my deepest nature. It's from a profound place that Schubert wrote it, which touched my profound place. I feel that it has taken these many years that I can touch this place. It doesn't happen the first time that you hear it. It's someplace very deep, something very deep in my Buddha Nature - something very deep in Schubert's Buddha Nature as well.

... I finally discovered a bit of music that I enjoy. There's a pianist named Roselyn Tureck. It is a very simple piece and even though the music is distorted, it is exquisite. She is such a master at the piano. There's something beautiful that comes through. The music flows through her fingertips. There's no other pianist like her. She evokes the music. She doesn't just hit the keys, but draws the music out of them. She has a perfect sense of rhythm and timing.

The name of the piece is called *Partitas* and it's composed by Bach. It's composed for piano and they are short pieces. That's what I am listening now. Her playing is masterful and even though distorted, it comes through beautifully. It's magical.

... I am discovering new songs that I have heard before, but somehow they are more meaningful now. I can hear new things, new depth of meaning. When before, I would think that a musical piece was very nice, now I find that it has such meaning, but I can't explain what the meaning is. It's like Buddhism. You have to know it in your bones.

... Music is my great love and it has been an indescribably important part of my life. There's a beautiful little song by Schubert called, *To Music*. There are words in the song talking about the sacred art. It's

sacred in a sense, not only that it is holy, but beloved as well – music, being a beloved friend.

Instead of a human being, music holds a great emotional place within me. So even though I can't hear it well, I still can hear it in my head. So music is the great love of mine.

It's a special kind of love that moves me. It gives meaning to my existence. I guess it's something real. It reminds me of that sense of Suzuki-roshi's quote, 'It's only in the evanescence of our lives that we find the joy of eternal life.' It's on page 119, in his *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* book. My life has meaning in relationship to eternal reality.

It gives your life meaning, as you understand the joy of life, as you are filled with eternal joy. It's a feeling of connectedness to reality, to eternal reality, not to the day-to-day transitory happenings. It makes you realize that you have an eternal quality; that you are eternity as well as the evanescence of a particular body; that you are something beyond this body that will disappear soon. We are all disappearing every day, some sooner than others.

... There's a piece of music that I am playing over and over the last two weeks. It's Beethoven's *Trio #7* with Pablo Cassals and it's called *The Arch Duke*. I also have other more recent recordings of that trio piece with other artists. But this old recording is a revelation for me.

I am somewhat understanding what's the difference between the performances of master musicians as compared to good musicians. The master musicians somehow bring out the relationship between the notes. You hear the little melodies and the little groupings of notes and the relationship between the notes. You hear things that you don't hear in the regular performances.

... I am also finding out that if I am intensely enjoying a piece of music, my blood pressure goes up. So I have to learn not to get ecstatic about it! I have to be calmer and let the music flow through me without the intensity - to relax and let the music come through. If you are too intense about it, I guess you are trying to hang onto it. You can't be attached to it.

... I think that my ear has become more educated by the years of listening. So I have educated myself. I guess that I have become more aware of things after those many years. I become the piece of music that I am listening to. This is another gift of getting old. There are some advantages to being old. Time slows down and it also speeds up. The older you get the faster the days go by!

... Music is out of this world, literally, and in this world at the same time. It's the force of creation and destruction, making the universe the way it is - making and remaking. And evidence of that is fine music.

It's music and it's also meditation. So the great composers have latched on this force and brought in something beautiful - the creativity and destructive force. In music, you hear a sound, but before you catch it, it disappears and there's another sound. You can't catch a sound. It's always moving. It's gone before you can catch it and then there's another one.

You forget your self and you become the music as it is changing. This is your self, at that moment. You loose your self, but you are this wonderful beautiful movement that is continually created and destroyed.

Each piece of music is seeking the wholeness but in a different way. Everything is sort of gravitating toward wholeness; the wholeness in this piece of music; the wholeness in this friend; the wholeness in love; and the wholeness in the beauty of a flower. We seek the wholeness in us. We seek wholeness in everything - the wholeness in life.

... I think music is a bridge to happiness - a bridge to emptiness.



... on the Vision Quest

... [After Betty's first solo Vision Quest trip]

"The Return **1987**

Dearest Buddies,

There was the long ride back from the desert, and as I rested I listened to your talk of family and loved ones. When we parted early Friday morning it seemed unreal to be alone again. Home at last, I gave thanks for our safe return, took that much needed bath, had a snack, and went to sleep about 4:00a.m.

It was so beautiful up there on the ridge. I knew that I was the mountain, the valley, the moonrise, the sunrise, the Earth itself and all her creatures. And I felt the anguish for the State of the World, man's inhumanity to man and insensitivity to Mother Earth. No demons came to torment me; also no great visions or prophetic dreams.

Having lived alone for the past 40 years, except for 5, I was accustomed to being on my own. Having backpacked for 22 years, I had carried many loads to the mountaintop and was at home in the wilderness. Even the three-day fast was no problem. I was surrounded by your love, and hoped that I was of help to you also in your vigils.

But a powerful medicine was at work within me. As I came to consciousness later Friday morning I felt my heart open up and beat with universal love – the love which you, the group had so freely given. I was being transformed, the Fool, the Child again. I lay there and wept with love and gratitude for you all, and thankfulness for our coming together.

The garden shimmered in the sunlight. New blossoms opened everywhere, fruit trees leafed luxuriantly, vegetables and weeds flourished. Here was the bounty of the Earth, with nourishment for body and spirit.

This is just the beginning of what I hope will be the transformation into a more openly loving and aware person. May your Returns be likewise blessed.

My everlasting love and gratitude,
Betty"

... **[To the questers on their pre-trip meetings]**

“At an exhibit I saw this work and it struck a very deep cord within me. It is called the Guide. Marilyn and I are guides. Our calling is to take you to the land of the Sacred Mountain. We have some road maps to guide us. But when we reach the land of the Sacred Mountain there are no maps, because there are no borders – and here, you are your own inner guides, who must take over, for each of us has a different Sacred Mountain and must blaze our own trail.

This is the mountain of our fears: our fear of the darkness, the unknown, of death itself, and of our fears of specific agents of death like falling, accidents, violence, catastrophe, snakes, bears, spiders, or disease. It is our fear of failure, feelings of inadequacy, doubt, confusion, and guilt.

We who undertake the Vision Quest are aware that the only solution is to face the fears, face ourselves. We must let the inner guide surface and trust our feet, one foot forward at a time.

To climb, we must think like a mountain. Little ego must die. You must die and become no longer self or other. You must Be the Mountain. Then you will be aware of faint glowings of light before you – above you – as the path opens before you on the way toward the dawn. But this is of course not some thing to accomplish in a week. It is the task of a lifetime.”

... The Vision Quest is a whole life. Being out in the wilderness, helping others to enjoy the wilderness experience, experience themselves in the wilderness, and being with Marilyn was very important. I liked all the work involved. It’s a good kind of work.

On the trips, I would prepare the food. I usually packaged the solo drinks like the maple syrup. I measured the syrup. I put it into a little bottle. I put a little piece of wax paper over the top before I put the lid on. I put it in a little plastic bag with a twisty. I turned it upside down to check and see if it leaked. Sometimes, someone noticed that it was packed with care. That was an insignificant small thing. But each thing that I arranged, I tried to do with care. Just doing everything with care, like Suzuki did.

So I liked preparing the food, packing, setting up, finding the base camp, and hiking. I enjoyed the times when I went out on my solo, when the group was small. I enjoyed meditating in the wild and teaching the questers meditation. I enjoyed the people who came. They were all with such insight and interesting ways of living and people who helped improve things in the world.

... Going on a Vision Quest I found that you are an integral part of the whole pattern of existence. I also understood people better, as to what their motives and aims were and what they were searching for. The more I understood people, who at the time of their Vision Quests were in a very critical part in their lives, the more it broadened my mind to acquaint myself with their problems. I was on my quest by helping others to understand their own quests. It was a sort of a service and a deeper knowing of nature – becoming it.

Today, I have a t-shirt that depicts the Native American concept of existence; by the way, the Native Americans are the originators of the Vision Quest experience. You know the medicine wheel?

You are born in the East, where there is light and the pattern of sunny days and then as you become a child you are in the South, where there is innocence and trust. Then as you become an adult you are in the West, where you develop your intuition and then when you get old you are in the North, where there is wisdom. So they knew and understood all this from observing how the seasons of the year keep turning to their own pattern.

The Native Americans understood more about being alive and the whole pattern of living and how you are integral with it all, than people do now. Your life is a microcosm of the whole pattern of the medicine wheel. It expresses that continuity, the movement within movement, within movement, because you are part of the pattern of the universe. Your life is a retelling of the pattern of birth and death.

... I think what was happening is that I myself was looking for a deeper understanding that I was not separate from nature. I loved the wilderness and all the other creatures there, but there's a big step between liking or loving nature, and becoming nature itself. You see, if you like something you are here and the other is there. Understanding that nature is not an object, but rather that you are nature, that is very difficult to come to. Like in Buddhism, there is no separation between myself and that.

You are drawn to things that are going to teach you what you need to know. That's why you are there to get. You get into a situation in order to learn what you need to know.

I had done a lot of backpacking in the Sierras before, which helped me break down some of the barriers of understanding why I was loving doing the Vision Quest so much. I loved it so much, because it's overwhelming to be in so much beauty. It makes you realize that there's something more to this life. And becoming immersed in the mountains and the

desert, you have certain feelings and eventually the barriers are broken down between you and nature.

I kept doing the Vision Quest trips, because they were good for me. At the time, I was not realizing what that experience was doing for me. So that was another step towards this unity. I had to do the living at The Redwoods in order to get to that realization too.

[The 60 Vision Quest trips that Betty did with Marilyn were held in these locations: Eastern and Western Inyo Mountains (East of the Sierras); Sweetwater Mountains (Toiyabe National Forest); Last Chance Range and the Eureka Valley (now part of the Death Valley National Park); Granite Mountains (Mojave National Preserve); Granite Mountains (Mono Lake area); Owlshead Mountains (South end of Death Valley, where temperatures were at 17F for six nights and low in the 30s by day. They slept on the ground without tents curled around their water bottles); Saddle Peak Hills (Death Valley); Silurian Hills (South of Death Valley); Turtle Mountains (South of Needles); Kingston Range Mountains (Northeast of the Mojave Preserve); Old Woman Mountains (West of the Turtle Mountains/Needles); Silver Peak Range (Nevada, East of the White Mountains); Glass Mountains (Mono Lake area); Ventana Wilderness (Big Sur) with the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology; and Last Chance Range (Death Valley) with members of the Jungian Institute of San Francisco]



Betty, 71 years old, after her first Vision Quest in the eastern Inyo Mountains, CA.

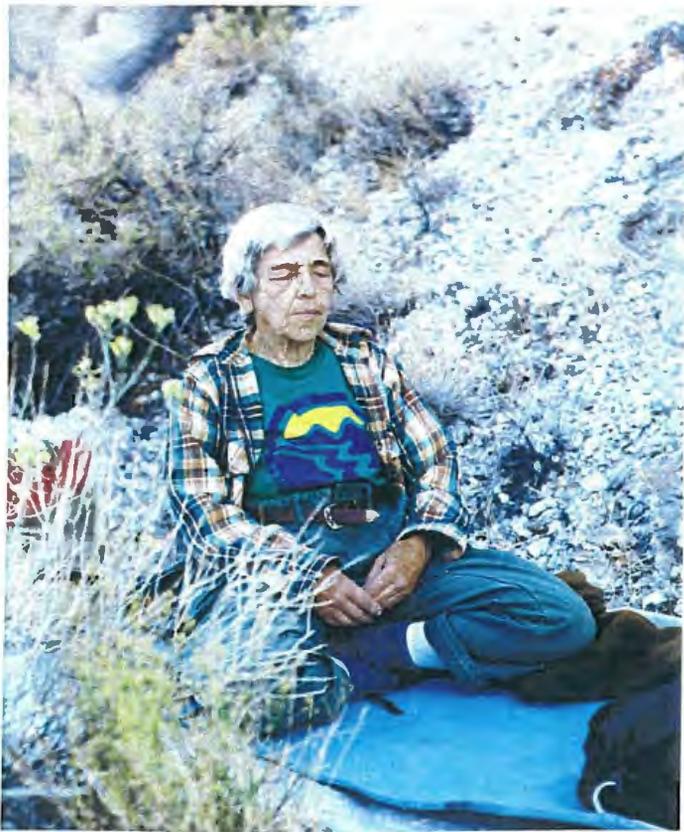


Betty, 78 years old, on a Vision Quest

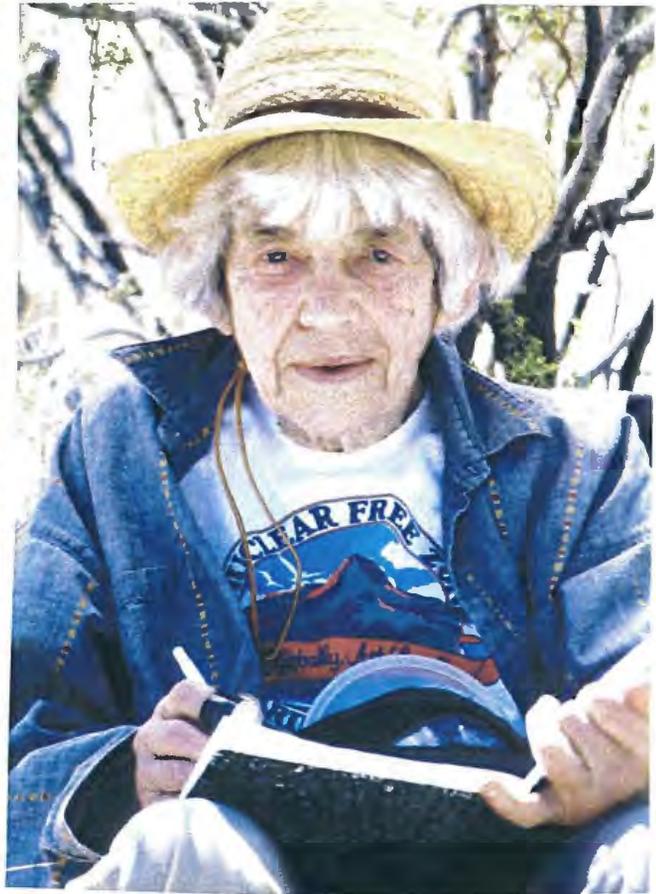
Betty at
the medicine circle
holding a gift
from a quester.
Glass Mountains
base camp, near
Mono Lake, CA.



Marilyn and Betty, in Turtle Mountains, CA., a harsh trip
December 1992



Betty, 80 years old, meditating during solo in Silver Peak Range, Nevada.



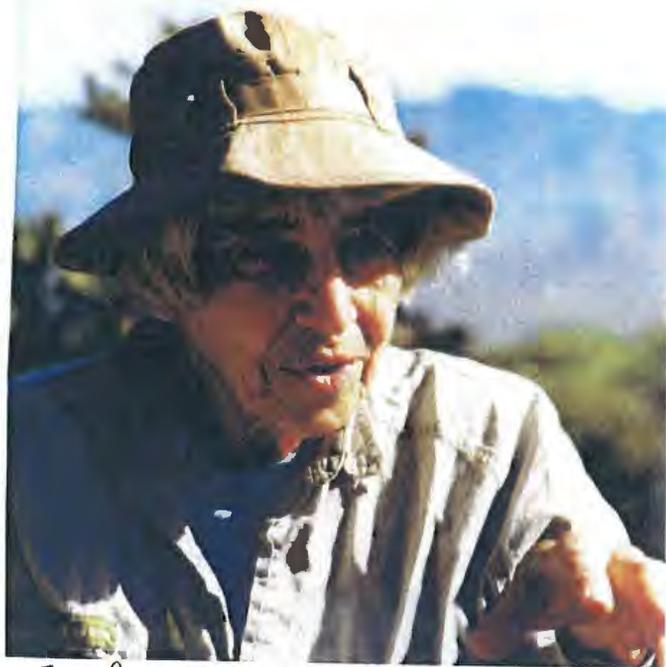
In base camp keeping the trip log



Betty, 80 years old, returning from a Vision Quest



Betty, 83 years old, teacher and guide at the Kingston Range (Mojave)



Teaching meditation before questers leave for their 4-day solo fast.



Betty and Nitsa on a Vision Quest trip, doing the prep work!



Betty and Marilyn preparing bouquets for the returning questers from their solo

... on The Redwoods Assisted Living in Mill Valley

... This is my schedule, 7 days a week:

Home: 7-11am, except Tuesdays when I teach a meditation class

Out for walk and lunch: 11-1:30 or 2pm

Call: 2-4:45pm, except Thursdays when I teach a meditation class

Out to dinner: 4:50-6pm

Home: 6-9:30pm, except Sundays – out 6:30-7:30pm for the peace vigil

Out Fridays: 3:30-6pm for the peace demonstration

... I live a simple life here. For breakfast I have organic food and good bread to eat. The bread they have here is mushy. I was out of bread the other day and I put a piece of bread in my toaster at the usual setting and it broke up to pieces. My bread gets nicely golden. And at lunch I get a hard-boiled egg from the salad bar and have a hard-boiled egg for breakfast, toast and cheese, milk, my home canned fruit, and organic shredded wheat. So I have a good breakfast. I listen to the news and then to some music.

For lunch there's the salad bar and then lots of times there's a hot dish, like left over chicken from the night before. But sometimes it's frankfurter and sauerkraut that I don't care much, because I don't eat meat - just poultry, fish, dairy, and eggs. Sometimes they have good pasta and sometimes they have fish.

I'm allergic to sugar. It'll keep me awake if I eat anything sweet. And also I should eat meals often. I get hungry every 2-3 hours. So, I take a big salad for lunch and save half of it for 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And sometimes if the dinner menu is not what I like, as for example, when there is a choice of ham or roast beef, then I can take some chicken from lunch to the dinner in a little plastic container. The menu is displayed on the bulletin board every day.

In the mornings, I either walk or take a rest. I rest in the daytime. I don't go to sleep. I put my CD and listen to it and relax to the music. I really listen to it for about an hour and then I try to answer the mail.

... Since I have been here, I have been neater than I have ever been. Having everything condensed into one little place I don't have room to make a mess. I put everything away every day. Some people work for a feeling of space. They want it to be wide open. So they might not have a desk or much furniture.

In furnishing this room, first I wanted my music and then I wanted to be able to do things, like have a big table to do things on - where I can

hammer stuff on. So I use the bench out on the deck to do that. I have a board that works more as a worktable and with the tools that I have I can do whatever ideas come through. I have this project now to make a little shelf.

... “When I moved to The Redwoods, I took a carefully selected set of tools, appropriate for possible projects. I set up shelves, record cabinets, and built a large new CD shelf, which I plan to expand. This week I decided to raise a bench under the large table, 2 inches, so that a small chair would slip neatly underneath. I also have a useful assortment of pieces of wood, nails, and screws of all sizes, so ideas can be brought into actuality, often without even going to the store. I will always be a user of tools. I am always unfinished – a work in progress.”

... This is the time of my life where it needs to be integrated – that the spiritual is everyday life. It’s a time of integration. Being here at The Redwoods is a wonderful education. You have to become integrated in order to live here, to really make the most of it. You have so many opportunities being here. Without doing anything, you become integrated, whether you like it or not. I guess you have to be open to it.

This is your last stop and you realize that you don’t have a lot of time to play around. It’s like your last chance and all these years you have been putting off what the meaning of life is and now you do have to face it. And some people don’t manage to do that.

All of the teachers you have had in your life, they push on you in different ways. And if you are fortunate to have good teachers and good friends and all the problems you had, you are taught something. If you haven’t had any problems you haven’t learned much.

... So my next teacher is being here at The Redwoods. I have just seen more of myself reflected here in other people, than anywhere else. This is a way of learning in your bones, you see. And then you are my greatest teacher. That little idea of yours, writing a little story of my life, has turned out to be a wonderful way of finding out more about who I am and who you are. That’s what it’s all about.

... The Redwoods is ‘the finishing school’ – the end of the line, where you are finished. Some people don’t go anywhere, but there is an opportunity to reach so many people who are in need. You can help here. This place is so special, because we have so much freedom to express ourselves.

You have to realize that relationships here are temporary, but that they are also intense. You have to give your self to a friendship, because it might not last that long, either you or the other goes. Instead of counting

on a relationship that it will be there for you forever, like the love of your life for example, you realize how precious it is for the time that you have it.

... All the seniors here are in their last stage of their lives, coping with some physical problem or another and yet they are intensely alive and concerned. For me, it was a sobering experience of this place, of the predicament that we find ourselves in, of how old we are, and still be so alive exhibiting the courage to be. Have you read Tullich's book, *The Courage to Be*? The courage just to be is big in itself and when we realize that soon we are not going to be, we still have the courage to be involved, aware, and interested.

The meaning of this whole place – being here and not waiting to die, but learning to live to the fullest – is perhaps, the first time in people's lives that they are so intensely alive. Perhaps they are not aware of this. They do what they are moved to do, what they feel to do, standing up, and living their convictions.

You have a broader view than just your family. You feel that you are moving with the universe. There are different degrees of awareness of this. It strikes me that people here are feeling very involved. It's very personal, because everyone is coping with some illness, which possibly it might be their last, but they are very much concerned and alive.

I wonder if the staff is aware of what they are doing to promote this feeling of security, knowing that life has a meaning even though it has an end to it. They seem to understand that it's our last years, so they want to provide us with as much meaning, freedom of choice, safety, and a holding environment, that we can experience and express our being during our last days here.

... And everyone has had such a different path, you see. Talking with other people you find that everyone has had a different life, like people being in the service during WWII and so on. They all served differently, like some served in the Red Cross, others for the American Friends, and others in the bomber squads. And yet they are finding how it has contributed or not contributed to their growth. They have grown up through different experiences. So everyone sees life from a different perspective, because of the experiences that they have accumulated in their lives.

In terms of having the same meaning or not I liken it to Indra's net, where the idea of life is that it's a net and each node is a different person with their own outlook about life. So meaning is meaning, the net is one, but meaning is viewed from countless number of perspectives and places

depending on where you are in your life's passage. We are all in a different place in the net and yet we are all in the same net. Life is the net. The net is life made up of all these countless intersections.

... Things seem to unfold in quite a marvelous way here. It's learning to go with the flow and you find your way. It's what is called The Tao. The Tao is The Way and if you learn to go with The Way, you are sailing. If you attach or hook on it then you make a mess out of it.

As you begin to understand and become more aware of life, then the feelings of frustration kind of subside, or they take their appropriate place. You do not get hooked on them and instead you do something more positive. We see how people deal with things in different ways, but most people here take it as it comes.

... I don't know how I adjusted so easily from being solitary and then being amidst 300 others. I was not afraid of it or resented it. It was a natural progression. Being with other people seems to have woken me up. And so I think I really started to realize that I was not alone, that I was part of something bigger.

When I was alone I knew all that theoretically, in my mind, that everything was connected. But here I am in the midst of community. I might have had a lot of nice theories of being part of everything and here I actually am part of everything. That's very different.

I have never felt that connectedness when I was growing up and not having a family to speak of. I somehow did not feel belonging to a cohesive unit. And having no siblings, my mom and dad not being real close, and not having playmates, I did not have a bond with anything. I did not have a feeling of togetherness that others within a family might have. I felt some with my playmates, but I felt more like a solitary person in the sea, the ocean.

Here I began to feel more of a bond to all human beings. It is inevitable when you see all these faces around you. Other people become a reality, rather than abstract. So before I came here a lot of the ideas that I had, that we are connected, were all abstract and theoretical. Here, I began to feel the actual connectedness than the theory of it.

... Living with other people is more intense. Like one Friday afternoon, during the peace rally, sitting in a corner and having the honking and singing, you feel that you are not alone. You are sort of immersed in it.

And then in the meditation class, it was the first time that I really shared all the little knowings that I had acquired and that meant that I

understood it better. I was surprised with that. I could actually feel some of the things that I was theorizing about and I got more deeply into the understanding. So I find that the Prajna Paramita is constantly a new teaching for me.

It's like understanding more that my everyday living is meditation. Everyday is a good day and I learn something. Things unfold really slowly. I am finding out that the choosing is done for us when we are in tune.

My heart is bigger, more open, and compassionate. Everybody has problems and I become more compassionate and much more aware that my own problems are not more severe as someone else's. It's a way to get less selfish and more compassionate.

... Community matures you. Here, it's very common to have some kind of a handicap. Everybody is accepting of everybody's different disability. It's very democratized. Most people feel the friendliness and acceptance. People feel at home with their disabilities. It's a place where you learn compassion for oneself and everybody else. There are people that are worse off than I am. The leader of the peace group is almost blind and is still functioning.

I do feel at home living here. I feel so good. I don't think that there's another place like it in the country. One reason is that it's a non-profit with a board of a lot of church people. Other places are for profit and they can't give the services for the same amount of money. If people want to make profit, then they won't give you as much for your dollar. Like our whole country, most of education and health are for profit, which the government should give you.

... At The Redwoods you have all sorts of people with different backgrounds. It's a melting pot and so the feeling becomes very inclusive. You learn more by being with your peers, because they have the same needs and abilities like your self. You understand many people this way and we all accept the fact that we are falling apart. We are all determined that we live as long as we will live.

... We don't want to wait and die. That's why it's so wonderful being here, because you can improve yourself until you die. They offer you all these self-improvement activities. There are about ten activities scheduled each day, from exercise classes, lectures, writing groups, meditation class, dancing, and so much more.

They also offer daily excursions to the San Francisco museums or a boat ride on the Bay, with a fee of course. Getting out is good for a lot of

people. I don't feel confined or wanting to go to these excursions. But a lot of people do. I like to go to Whole Foods to buy my groceries. That's one of my outings.

... I am happy to wake up in the morning and meditate. It's more tiring during the day. I have lots of good friends and during the day I plan my meditation classes.

.... It's been a clarifying time for me being here. Even the political activist part of me has come back, as well as having the opportunity to teach meditation. It taught me more than I have taught the students.

... We have this one woman on our floor who is so frustrated by so many things, but she has the sunniest, most beautiful disposition. She walks down the hall, humming and singing totally unfazed by her problems. She loves to sing in a chorus and she is always happy and positive. So she is just a person who makes you realize that your troubles are not so bad.

She is an enlightened person. Her problems don't interfere with her joy of living. She is such an example to everyone. And this makes me realize that a person like that is truly enlightened.

She hasn't spent years in meditation, but has helped many people in her life. I think probably she believes in God very deeply and she must be quite religious - such a simple, beautiful everyday religion. She is not going around preaching to people, but is humming.

And The Redwoods brings all kinds of people together like that. This is nirvana, because we have such a wonderful opportunity to enjoy our last years, sharing them with others. So this is a sort of a lecture on how her light shines through!

... Living here I feel not separate. I am really whole. Maturing is feeling that you are the universe and at the same time you are your own unique flashing out of emptiness.

... It feels like home to me. I often recline on the bed and hear some music and I can look around my room and here's the story of my life. It's all right here and the music all around.

Like my first real home of my own was the Sausalito house, and then my spiritual home is the Zen Center, and now this is my last stopping place on this planet.

... So I am really happy here. I feel one with the cycles of the earth. I watch the tides come and go and it's part of the whole rhythm of life.

... In the Prajna Paramita it says, 'With no hindrances in the mind,' and, 'Beyond diluted thoughts.' This is nirvana in a way. I think that living at The Redwoods is nirvana, full of difficulties as well as pleasures. There are still problems to work out and do, but there's a feeling of peace and a sense of coming home.

The other day I was realizing that this was indeed nirvana. I was getting a pedicure with nothing to do, enjoying my after lunch rest and was immersed in this beauty of a place, parlor, and all. So nirvana is very personal as to what happens to you.

A lot of people still are taken up with their problems and they don't realize what this is. You make your own heaven and hell wherever you are; whether you are resting, outside holding a peace sign, or eating lunch with your friends. That's nirvana – where you are right now.

The Redwoods



The Redwoods





Betty's Altars

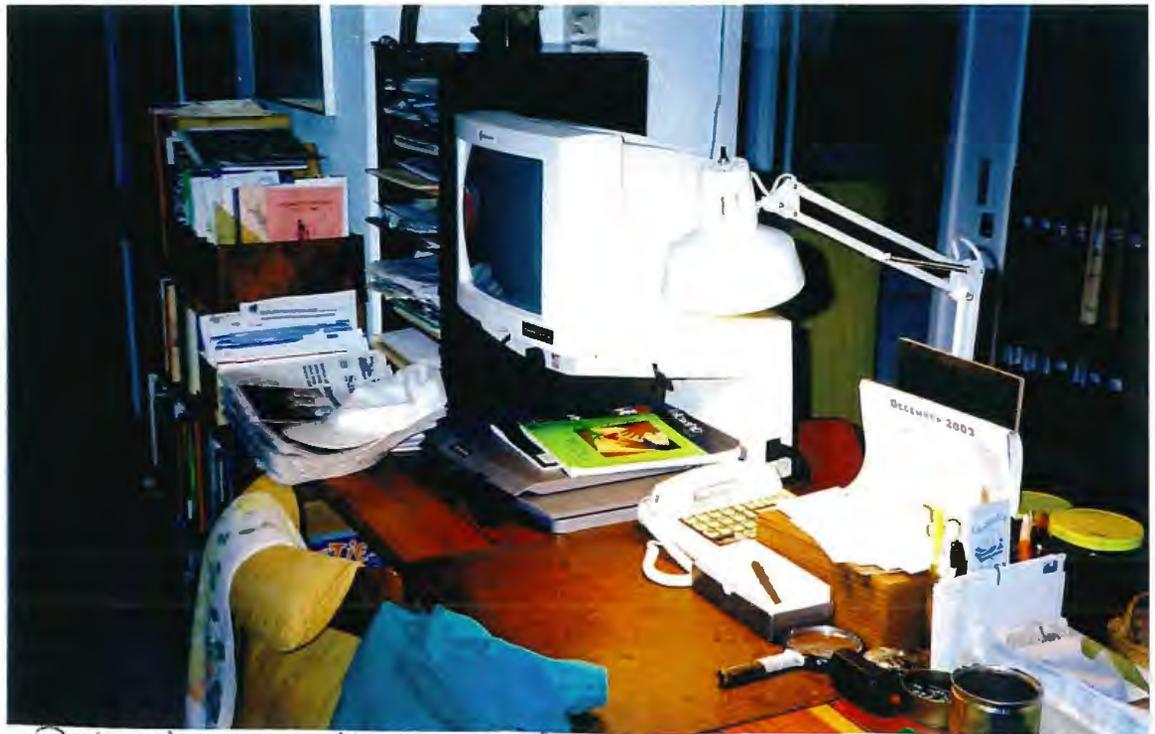




Betty's music collection



Betty's 'tools'



Betty's 'reading machine'

... on blindness

... Don't bother cleaning my windows, because I can't see anything anyway. Everything is a soft blur. I can see some outlines of the trees and the reflection on the water. I can see some houses if they are white. I see a bit of contrast. So don't waste your energy.

... Now I can't depend on my eyes to read and I cannot depend on anything else, but I am not bored, because I can sit and look out the same window and find it is always new. I can see the whole pattern of existence, right here, every day new.

It's new and the same thing at once. You see it. It's all there. It's the whole pattern of existence. Just being aware of it. I am aware of things that I can't see. I can see general areas, like the marsh, which is closer, and the hills, which are farther away. I can be aware of these presences – the life that is going on. I don't have to see the outlines. I just know that lots of things are there.

... My not seeing does not mean that everything is a blank. I am aware of everything out there that is changing. There's a reciprocity that whatever you see is you and whatever you see is complete and whole. If you read Suzuki's, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, you will get the idea of this.

... I sat on a bench with somebody who was kind of blind and saying how beautiful everything looked – the clouds, the marsh, etc. and I remember that attitude of acceptance of her blindness and still appreciating beauty. I remember that very clearly.

... I don't consider it as a terrible tragedy. It's almost appropriate for my age, because it draws a veil over things. It blurs the edges of one thing into another, so I am beginning to understand more. I can feel more that I am not separate. And this is what we have to learn in our lives. At the end of our lives, we have to learn that we are not separate. We must feel it and not only know it intellectually. We actually have to feel it.

So with the poor vision, everything is a big bright blur. This kind of blindness does not affect the optic nerve, which if affected could bring darkness. This muscular degeneration, the part of the eye that focuses on details, still keeps the peripheral vision. There's a lot of light and color and that makes of a great brightness. It's not the kind of blindness that is dark. It's of a different world, very diffused, a non-separate sort of world.

... This morning, at the end of my meditation as I looked up I saw the light just coming in through the window. It was totally breathtaking. It filled me with radiance. It was coming and going. I would be aware of it through my closed eyelids – light and then dark, aware of the changing light.

You see, the sun is the source of all of our lives. There's nothing happening here without the sun. It reminds me of T.S. Eliot's poem about the light. It goes through our Soul. It's tremendous. It was beautiful – as it was coming in. It goes right through you. Most of the time you don't notice it. Sometimes it comes in and makes you realize how essential it is.

... There's something interesting about my blindness. There's this curtain that's been pulled, both obscuring and illuminating. It makes me more observant of my inner self. It's sort of softening and quieting of everything, but it's also a kind of a nuisance, because anything I want to read I have to run to the reading machine.

It's an inner illumination. I can't be more specific about it. In a way, it could come a little closer to seeing things as they are or is, which includes the idea that they are all one. And this may somehow be that. What really is obscuring is my *selfing*. I am no longer looking at things through the glasses of self. This blindness has brought more understanding about what keeps me seeing things as they is.



The Marsh from Betty's deck

... on words of wisdom

... You asked what advice would I give to somebody. I don't believe in giving advice. I don't think people want advice. I think that people just want to explore and then they will see aspects of themselves that they need to be working on. But I think instinctively people get turned off when given advice.

They can take a little advice here and there and consider it all and take it in through themselves and see what they can use, because everyone is so different. We do service to the whole by being true to ourselves.

... The Absolute is nothing. That's what meditation is supposed to teach you. You sit and you rely on nothing. You are not learning backwards or forwards. You rely on nothing, which is your Buddha Nature. I think that there is a section at the end of Suzuki-roshis' book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* on, 'Believing in Nothing.' That section tries to explain what I am saying here.

You don't rely on anything outside of your self. It means that you rely on your Buddha Nature. So that's the meaning in the instruction to just sit. You learn to rely on your self, meaning your Buddha Nature. You can't rely on your parents, or your therapist, or whatever.

So you can't give advice to anyone, because they are at different stages in their lives and the lesson of each experience is different for everyone. You have to tackle it as it comes. Basically, each person has to tackle each experience differently, depending on other experiences that they have had, and the lessons that they have gotten from those experiences. My answer is not anyone else's answer.

... To appreciate and enjoy life as fully as possible; to help others enjoy and appreciate life as fully as possible; to understand that everything is continually changing and to not resist; to go with the flow; and to trust your Buddha Nature. It takes your whole life to figure out how to trust your Buddha Nature. Be patient and steadfast.

... You can't plan how your life is going to happen. Just let it happen. Go with what is, with The Tao, and sail along! That's all that you can do anyway.

You are presented with choices in every turn and you have to make them. Your life depends on the crossroads, on the choices that you make, because your life is a succession of choices. So sometimes planning seems to make a difference and sometimes life just happens.

And maybe a combination of the two is what is happening. The right choices come from being in tune.

You make choices that suit your inner most nature or your Buddha Nature. The best choices are the ones you make without working over all sides of everything; the ones that you can make without consulting your self too much. When your ego and that of others go into those decisions, they are not always the right ones.

... You don't try to push away the things that you don't like. You just let them go. Meditation is the main way to understanding all this. Also teachers are important and various activities, like tai chi, dance, music, or art - something that gets to you.

... The thing is that sometimes you miss and hit some of the rough edges. Just to take the world as it is, accepting that sometimes it's pleasant or unpleasant, without judging and without making stories about stuff, which is very hard to do in this day and age.

Otherwise, you keep suffering, wanting the world to be the way that you want it. It's a rather difficult balance, because you always want to change the world. What is it that you need to give up? Something you can't change? You know the serenity prayer?

So there are some things that you need to change, especially within your relationships, and some things you can't change and you need the serenity or the wisdom to tell the difference, or you need the wisdom more than the serenity. So you are always wondering, whether to accept something or do something about it. You must really accept everything, but you also need to change something. It's a very fine line between the two.

... Everything is confusing, because we live on two different planes. We live on the phenomenal plane, where everything is judged as good or bad or great and small. And then there is the Absolute plane.

On the phenomenal plane people are confused as to how to love everybody especially, the hard ones. Do you hate them, try to fight them, or do you love them anyway?

Then there is the Absolute plane, which is also changing, but it has no judgment. And we have to switch between these two planes and we get confused. It's very confusing when you have to make decisions in the phenomenal world knowing that it's not the Absolute reality.

So we have to realize the time scale of everything. In our daily lives we have to make decisions, but we have to realize that peace is timeless. Any effect from what we are doing with our activity for peace is not going to be felt in our lifetime. The universe is turning as it turns and not according to the stand that we take. We are one tiny factor in the way that it's turning and unfolding. Our actions are timeless.

... What's important is to find peace and composure as to where you are, just to be your self, to express your self in some way. It can even be in the last month of your life. It's not anything that you can show. Maybe it's loving someone and maybe that's the greatest thing that you have done in your life.

... Listen to your own True Nature. I can't tell you what to do. You have to learn to listen to your own True Nature and trust it. And I guess, never think that you know what it's all about. It will be different tomorrow, because everything changes.

... Everyone has to find the answer appropriate to him or her. But relax and enjoy life as you can. Don't be entangled by your desires, hopes, and expectations, instead accept what comes. Accept what is here and now and not some myth about the future. The only reality is this moment. Someone at the demonstration had a sign that read, 'Hope is on the way.' That's no statement. The only thing you can say is what's here and now. You cannot live on expectations.

There's a cartoon that shows somebody with a sign on his back saying, 'Jesus is coming,' and right behind him there is a Chinese man with a sign saying, 'Buddha; right here and now.' So we are not counting on what's coming. We are counting on what's here, now.

... Eat everything mindfully. Make sure to have different sensations on your plate to know the difference. I don't like to talk during eating, because it's a distraction. I think that in spiritual retreats you eat in silence. During a sesshin at the Zen Center we always ate in silence, so you could be mindful.

... With so many things we hesitate, avoid, or put it onto somebody else. Well, the thing to do is to just do it. Don't procrastinate. I don't worry about the eightfold path or whatever. I just do it. I'm not a word of wisdom or anything. I'm also floundering myself.

... Memorize the Prajna Paramita Sutra. It's really good for your brain.

... So this is your journey in life to come into realization that your little self will vanish as you become aware that you are the great Self. So that's your whole journey in life.

... To learn by doing it, whatever that is. You can't plan how you are going to take things. Know that everyone does it his or her own way. There's no helpful advice, because you have to learn it your way. You have to realize that you have to give things up and the more gracefully you do that, the happier you will be. To realize that giving up somebody or something is inevitable. That's why the more gracefully you do it the happier you are.

Also, realize that everybody gives things up. You are no different. You just feel compassion, because we are all in the same position. I am not attached to a particular person or thing, so I feel happy.

... Here's an advice! Do not be possessive in your relationships. Possessiveness ruins a relationship.

... You must love everybody, including the criminals. Your compassion must extend to people you do not like. You must love everybody and realize that everybody is your self, including people who do things that you don't like or approve of. The love for President Bush is theoretical. He is hard for us to love. Whether you like him or not, he is part of you.

... In order to let go of worry you have to trust that everything is going to be ok; that it is ok, so you should not be seeking otherwise. Just to know that you are ok and not trying to become ok. That life is ok, you are ok, and that's that!

... You receive more than you give. So I guess that's the lesson, that we might learn here – that in giving you receive. That's a way of maturation. If you can find a way to give, what you alone can give of your unique gifts, then it's not only manifesting your Buddha Nature, but you are also becoming mature.

... It's very important not to try too hard, because there's no place to go. Wherever you go there you are. You can't go anyplace without running into your self, right there.

... “In your personal practice I suggest you DO NOT TRY, but relax and let it happen. Let go. Be like the rainfall indiscriminately, without thought of self. You must shift your confidence from your temporal ego, the little self, to the eternal Great Self – your Buddha Nature.”

... To let go of your feelings that you are somebody distinct and separate of the rest of what's going on. Letting go of attachments to the idea of a separate self, you become free. But you always want to attach to something. If you are looking for an anchor, a place to anchor, then anchor in emptiness. There's really no other place to anchor.

Each existence is to express one's own particular Buddha Nature, because each one is different. You are most happy when you are expressing your True Nature. So we have the question, "Who am I?" And our job is to find who we are and express that.

... You don't know how it's going to turn out. It's very fascinating. What is Buddha Nature going to do next? So keep on asking the question.

... It's the habit of the mind to ask questions about everything. In the phenomenal world there's cause and effect. But there's no overall purpose, only to experience deeply. Everything is the way it is, because everything else is the way it is. You are there, because I am here. Good or bad or reasoning for that matter, has nothing to do with anything.

... You need to accept the truth that the very nature of everything is change, therefore there's no abiding self. When you can really accept this then you are in nirvana.

... You have to bring your spiritual life into what you do everyday. It's one love. It's everything. Everything you do is spiritual. There's no line between engagement in everyday life and spirituality. Being truly spiritual is being wholly involved in everyday life. There's nothing outside of daily life or the spiritual life. You have to bring them together.

... It's the life on this earth that's important. It's important how to live here and now and not waste time speculating about other worlds, because we do not know.

... Don't try to catch the moment, because it's all one big moment – all the moments that ever were or will be are right here, now. Time is an artificial concept of our minds. It's a fiction. We make it up in order to run society. Time is eternal. No time. Everything is happening all at once. The moment is everything.

... The mystery of life is being and the meaning of life is the living of it. There's nothing outside of it that will give it meaning.

... Don't fry your brains to find a reason to be happy!

... on death and dying

... “So you ask, ‘What about Death?’ That is the same as asking, ‘What is Life?’ They are the same thing: Life is Death. Death is Life. I can only explain it in Buddhist terms. Our feeble brain cannot know the answer or prepare a logical argument. We can only use contradictory terms.

Existence is an unconceivable vast presence of divinity=God=Buddha Nature, with the potential of *flashings* into existence in the phenomenal world, as people, plants, various animals, microbes, etc., – each expressing the essence of the divine nature in its own way, continuously changing until it rejoins the Whole or Emptiness.

Existence is all there is. Nothing is separate. It is existence and non-existence at once. Now you see it, now you don’t. It is the Emptiness that is form. The phenomenal world is not separate. It is the same as the World of emptiness, only it is manifest.

Although we may reach an understanding of the necessity and inevitability of Death, we must work to loosen the attachments that hold us to the phenomenal world. Perhaps we can do that by transforming our love for individual people and things into deep compassion for all existence. I work to accept, ‘Things as they is.’ (Suzuki-roshi’s lectures are a continual inspiration for my sitting practice). I do not believe that we have, ‘Immortal souls.’ Heaven and Hell are of our own making, right here on earth - as is ‘Nirvana’ - the place of perfect peace.”

... Suzuki-roshi prepared us for our lives and therefore for our deaths. He taught us to welcome death and not fear it, as you feel that you will become one with everything, which is the goal of the Buddhist life. You feel completed. He never told us this in words, you see. He just made it naturally what we would feel, what our attitude would be. He taught us through our bones mostly than the lectures that he gave.

... In his books, he also talks about being ill and accepting what comes, especially as he was getting older and sick. So you do what you can, like taking vitamins, and accept what comes. He says that it did not matter to him if he died soon. He was kind of a matter of fact of the whole thing.

You accept what comes. So I keep reading and rereading his two books and I keep coming across what’s appropriate for the day. I don’t understand it until later. The Prajna Paramita becomes clearer all the time, especially where it says, ‘No realm of vision or consciousness.’ These have more meaning to me now. Talking to you helps me unravel these things. You make me think more deeply.

... As for dying to just think that you are not going to be witnessing what's going on, is mind-boggling. You are not able to think about what is actually happening.

You don't really come to terms with your death until you are up the wall with it. It's immediate. I sort of feel that time is running out and I need to understand that life and death are the same.

I guess I have to trust. Suzuki-roshi says over and over again that we must renounce. He talks a lot about renunciation. This is never clear in his writing what do you have to renounce, but my feeling is that it is the renunciation of the thought that we are a separate self. Instead, you abide in the confidence of your original nature. So you are not afraid. This is important, especially as you come to your death. To have confidence in your Buddha Nature then you are not afraid.

... The Japanese say that something is more beautiful, because you know it is fleeting – only temporary. You only enjoy it for a short time and so you have to apply your whole life to it.

So Suzuki-roshi says that things are more precious, because it's only in this moment that you can enjoy them. You have to learn that to really enjoy things you cannot cling to them. You have to be willing to let them go.

What you enjoy is this moment, knowing that it won't last. So many of our relationships go with the idea that they have to go on forever, but by willing to let go, you can have a real relationship.

... **[January 20, 2004]** I am happy now – very, very happy, and happier than I've ever been. I can't imagine anything more that I need to complete me at this time in my life. I am able to enjoy and more able to let things go. Suffering is caused by clinging onto things, wanting them to be there for you forever, or wanting them to be different.

... Part of my life's works has been to unravel the confusion of my early years; to realize my original nature; to be more aware of what is my attitude towards death; and how it has changed through the years. You see, I was terrified about death when I was a child. When I first learned about death, I remember it was in high school. I thought that most people were afraid of death and that's why they turned to religion to appease that fear.

So the thought occurred to me that it would be the most altruistic thing to do to help people about heaven, God, and dying, was to become a

priest or something, so that they would not be fearful about death. That was too convoluted, as I did not believe in any religion. But studying and teaching science brought a more realistic perspective of the whole thing.

... When I was in junior high school, I had a little coin purse and I had a newspaper clipping that said, 'Death is the greatest adventure in life.' It is attributed to Charles Frohman, who said it as he was standing on the deck of the sinking RMS Lusitania. I was always afraid of death and when I needed reassurance, I would get this clipping out and read it.

Death was a constant concern or a continual fear in my life growing up. And I don't think that it had any connection with my parents' death. I couldn't understand what it would mean to die. I didn't think that that clip of paper would ward off death from me. It just gave me some reassurance that there was something positive there.

... Regarding death, I have the Buddhist view that Suzuki-roshi says in his second book, talking about life and death, that life and death are a continuum, a completion. It's the natural cycle of things. If you understand who you are, then you can accept that you will not be in this same state all the time. You will accept the fact that things change and this is the nature of life that's completed by death.

It's something that very gradually becomes real. It's not something that I fully know as yet. I am just beginning to accept it. It's a hard reality to accept. As you understand more of who you are, it becomes part of your orientation to life. I can't really say that I know it as yet, but I can feel it more and more.

... Did Marilyn tell you the time when her brother was dying, she was counseled by a mutual friend of theirs about death? She asked Dr. Tom Pinkson, "What happens when you die?" He went and got a glass of water and an ice cube and dropped the ice cube into the water, which of course melted in the water. And that was his answer.

That's a powerful illustration, of water going back into its original form. His line goes along with that of Buddhism. We go back to the emptiness. Our form is continuously changing and when we die we go back to our original form, which is emptiness. And that's how I am feeling right now. There are many ways of saying it like, 'Ice cube returning to water.'

... **[January 25, 2005]** My strength is getting less. It's very unpredictable. I think that I am beginning to get symptoms like I am getting out of breath. It depends how quietly I live. I can't go out in the evenings anymore. I can only go as far as the auditorium. I spend the

evening getting undressed. At nine I get a snack and then at ten I go to bed. I can't do anything exciting. I just need to go to sleep quietly.

I get totally exhausted all the time and I don't know if I have more time left. I have a sense of urgency these days, wanting to finish things up. I am not feeling that I am dying yet; I just feel that I am running out of energy steadily. It feels that I have a certain amount of life energy that's been used up.

I have come to terms with dying. You think of others dying and that's somehow how it is and that's it. But it's inconceivable to think of your own disappearance - accepting the idea of dying as a necessary thing. The idea of you not being alive is inconceivable. You can't think of not being here. You can't take all this in. It is hard to accept your own death. It's a very difficult feat to really think of your self not existing. I can't think about it.

Buddhism says that the whole world as it is, is a figment of your imagination. And if you think of not existing, then the whole world disappears. It's too mind-boggling to conceive of that. It's confusing. The mind is bogged. It doesn't know whether it's coming or going.

People say that there is no problem to dying. You are just not going to be here. I am trying to think and to accept all of this. You can go merrily along thinking that you will die someday, but if you know that this is going to happen in a few weeks or months, you find that you are unable to conceive of it. So I just have to accept that life and death are the same and to continue meditating with this acceptance.

... **[April 25, 2005]** "As my physical strength diminishes my spirit becomes more urgent, Zazen, deeper. A last and continuing task is to renounce any lingering notion of an abiding self the, 'Hindrance in the mind.' The Redwoods then becomes Nirvana.

We learn in many different ways. Not only through our eyes and ears, but also through our bones, which is what happens in Zazen. The posture perhaps produces subtle vibrations, flowing feelings, wordless knowings. This is why Suzuki-roshi stressed its importance. I am so thankful I have continued sitting. It is now perfectly comfortable for over an hour (Burmese posture)."

... I am getting slower, but I am also peaceful. I don't need to accomplish anything anymore. I feel that I have done all that I've needed to do. I feel somehow complete. I can't be really complete, but I feel this is a suitable place to be, surrounded by dear people and that's the way it is.

... **[January 6, 2006]** It's harder to go to sleep lately. I get in bed but I don't want to. I just don't want to close my eyes and go to sleep. I don't want to relax and lie down. Maybe I am afraid of lying down, because I am afraid that I will die. So when I wake up, I read Suzuki-roshi's lecture on transiency, and then I can go back to sleep. It's harder to relax. Maybe I go to sleep and getting one or two hours of sleep and then I can't go back to sleep.

So I worked on that last night. I had to ask myself, "What is it that I can't let go? The bed is comfortable, so what is it?" I found out that I just didn't want to lie down, because I was afraid to die. I didn't want to die. I am too attached to this self. I don't want to leave. And so when I realized that, that I couldn't find any composure in all of this, I was able to let go and relax, and went back to sleep!

When I realized that I was overly attached to this self and didn't want to leave, I finally did manage to relax and pull the covers up more and go to sleep. That idea, that I was overly attached to this self, was terrifying. It was very helpful to come to that though, because I could finally relax.

I have been thinking that in the sutra there's a line that says, 'With no hindrance in the mind and therefore no fear exists.' I realize that I am too attached to this self and I wonder if that's the hindrance that the sutra is talking about.

I got some good sleep last night and this morning I woke up with the alarm and got up right away and have been moving a little more efficiently than usual – a little more clearly than usual. I must have gotten something out of this. I think that it helped to clarify things. It was very interesting last night. I was able to face my fear, go to sleep, and then to wake up on time. It was amazing.

So I found out that I am attached to this self, because I want to be here and see what happens. I want to be here observing and doing things. I like this self and I just would like to see it continue.

I guess I didn't realize that what was bothering me was how attached I am to this life, to myself. I just asked the question of what's bothering me and I found out that I didn't want to let this self go. I was clinging to it. I wanted to preserve it. It's interesting to realize how attached you are to the self.

I hope that it'll really continue to clarify. It has felt different this morning, getting ready today, and waking up right away with the alarm. Lately, I've been sleeping an hour or more after the alarm. I hope that this will last more than a day. I think that I have more understanding about all this.

... **[January 17, 2006]** The goal maybe is that in everyday life to become aware of how I live. What do I do to stop the mind? I have a problem in the night when I try to go to sleep. The problem is of breaking through the selfish thoughts and delusions that keep me from being aware of the whole picture. It's hard to take that whole viewpoint. How do I shift my viewpoint from the ego concerns to the whole realization? Living without delusions is the way - to be able to come back into the present moment. That's hard to do.

I'm not breathing very well now. I sort of whiz when I breath. I'm not doing so well. I have trouble in keeping with it these days. I can't participate in the meditation group and I actually missed days at the demonstrations.

... I will know when my time to die comes. I do feel that I am getting incompetent, but I still can sit up in meditation. I will have to see. I seem to be slowing down though. All things come to an end. I still enjoy being alive. I am still too attached to this self. We are all attached. Maybe I have another six months or so. **[Betty shared this on January 10, 2006. She died on July 30th – almost six months later]**

... **[February 7, 2006]** The doctors say that I have about six months to live. I knew it anyway. I knew my heart was getting weaker. I still go down for lunch and dinner. I eat breakfast in my room. I might have to give lunch or dinner up and send those meals up, but you see, I like to be able to choose. So I go down and choose for myself and to also see my friends. I enjoy the aura of my friends. They are all patient with me for not taking part in the conversation.

... Hospice gets me a lot of services. I am visited by a social worker once a week and we just sit and talk and she tries to find out what I am interested in and stuff like that. And then the hospice nurse comes in also once a week and she is very nice and asks me if I need more medicine. It's a very well cared for life. So I can't complain. This is just the way it is.

... You must float with it. You just have to float. You can't try to make a sequence out of it. You float with it.

It feels soft. Everything is soft. There was an artist or poet who talked about how everything is soft and how you float with it - like my feather bed. I sleep on the bed that's already made and pull my sleeping bag over me. I keep the bed made and I sleep on top of the bed with the sleeping bag on me. So it gives me this floating feeling.

It's really a lovely feeling pulling up the sleeping bag over me. And for my afternoon nap I put my feet up on a pillow, put my cover on, and it's a very comfortable position.

... I feel very comfortable and I have no pain. Everyone around me here has pain. So many people have pain. And I just have temporary small pains. I have comfort most of the time.

I am surrounded by people, who can barely make it. I feel guilty some times that I am not hurting. I have no complaints and many pleasures. I am really enjoying my time here.

... **[February 7, 2006]** I am feeling ready to die. To prolong this situation is not very pleasant. I want to rest and of course I have to give up this self that I have worked on all my life - to relinquish it, be less attached to it.

I do it by just relaxing and letting others take over and rest. It's nice to really rest. I don't feel that I have to be in charge of the world. My friends are taking care of things well and hospice is very efficient. When they say that they are going to do something it is done immediately. So I have to relax and trust the world.

I don't know how it feels to surrender the control. I am just trying to relax into it. Somebody else knows how to do things now. I don't have to do it all. That's what I need to do - trust Buddha Nature and the people around me.

... I just have to get used to being dependent on others in a different way. I need people to do things for me. I am supposed to have my feet up. I can't do anything else but that - taking naps with my feet up. This is the first time of letting somebody do laundry for me. It's very hard to accept. I always liked to do things myself. I cannot do things now, but I have a lot of help. So I accept help graciously.

... I was thinking what I would do if I were confined in bed. I think that I could still play my music and still look out the window. I just think that I could have whatever comes along. A stroke would be difficult, if I could not talk or my mind was boggled, but I feel that I had a wonderful life.

... Well, it's taking me longer and longer to do things. I function less efficiently. I sort of stop and think what am I supposed to do next. I don't do anything special. I just do the morning chores and then go to lunch. So I don't know what to do about it.

... I do feel I'm sort of wrapping things up and appreciating all that I've done. I don't think that I could have done anymore.

I feel two ways about things. First, I feel that relationships should have been a big part of my life – deep ones. But I was doing things to express myself. I didn't do well in teaching. I didn't know how to build better relationships. The youngsters came from a different background than I came from and I couldn't bridge that gap. I was not very skillful dealing with relationships. In my mind I felt that I did good, but I really didn't understand how to bridge the gap.

Secondly, I didn't feel free to let myself go into relationships more, because I focused on academic achievements, working, and learning about the natural world. I guess it's hard to get both of them in.

You don't have that much time in your life. I guess people focus more on one aspect or the other. You can't do everything. But I did see a lot of the natural world and understood that. Also I had some understanding of Buddhism. That's a job in itself. So I couldn't do everything, I guess. One thing is that I am quite happy that I am finishing up my life.

... Since I have trouble dialing the phone, Marilyn called my good friend Bill Kwong. He started with me in the first group of meditators with Suzuki-roshi and now is the abbot of the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center, in Santa Rosa. We have remained friends during all these years. He has called me several times to talk.

When he first found out that I was not going to live too long, he called me and he said to me, "How wonderful!" It is wonderful. I don't have responsibilities except to go along, eat, sleep, and just show up at the right time and in the right place.

In a sense it's a completion. Now I can become one with everything. It's very good to talk to him. He has gone a long way, but he is still Bill. He has no pretensions of being somebody great, like an abbot. He is still himself. He is not putting on airs being somebody. He still has time to talk to me - an old friend. I said that I was happy and he said he was happy for me too.

... **[February 20, 2006]** I am basically happy. It's a wondrous place to be. I am about to become part of the great mystery.

I have been working towards this for a long time, being in this wonderful place, looking out this window becoming part of what I see – the tide, the marsh, and living with the sun, the moon, and the stars. It has helped

me understand that I am part of all this. I am all this, the sun, movement, part of everything I see.

It's a wonderful education looking out my window. More and more I have become one with everything that I see. It's all moving in harmony. Everything is moving in a harmony and I have gradually become aware of it. You see, many people look out and see a pretty view. It's so much more than a pretty view. It's existence. It's a harmony that you can actually see - the moving of the creek, the stars, and the tides.

We are the mystery. We cannot explain it. We're being it from moment to moment. This is existence and it's changing every moment. It changes according to its pattern. This is like Suzuki-roshi's lecture on transiency. We are changing every moment. It seems to be according to a pattern. Everything seems to move in a pattern, in harmony, except mankind - everything but man.

... **[March 13, 2006]** I am not as much in control of my life. I sort of drift along. I don't seem to be here. Some of the time I sort of float with what I have to do. I don't seem to be as present. My daily life is very different. Sometimes I feel confused and sometimes I am not here. I think that I am sort of gradually going into the beyond. I am not afraid.

... There is a lecture in Suzuki-roshi's book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, called, 'The Zen of Going to the Restroom!' A big point is that our mind becomes so cluttered up that we have to go to the restroom to clean our minds out. You have to be really mature to accept death. An old person finds it suitable. It's necessary and acceptable. So it would be a terrible thing if nobody died. It's a natural course of things.

... We have our little say with our lives. We came here to say this little piece. Each one of us is a Truth, a Dharma. We can't expect to come back as ourselves, because this configuration will dissolve and be something else.

... You are constantly living and dying. You think of dying and then you come back into life instantaneously. There's no difference between living and dying. It's a continuous process of living and dying. So you can't say, "Now I live," or, "Now I die," because you instantaneously go from one to the other. It's the same emptiness. It's every place all the time. It's a flow.

To not attach to either state. We suffer, because we attach ourselves to life. There is an attitude towards death. We fear death, because we go into emptiness and we do not come back.

... So when you approach the time of death, you understand that there is no separate self in relation to life and death. When you are young you don't know the implications of it. As you approach your own death you understand the implications of not having a separate self.

It's something you have to realize what it means in your own life. How this intellectual idea can become more understandable and more acceptable. You are busy avoiding death and you try to work through difficulties always with the view of preserving your individual life. It's not until you are actually face to face with death that you begin to understand what it means to you.

Understanding that there is no separate self completes your life. It brings a kind of significance to your life of what you have been doing all these years. It leaves you with a feeling about the unity of existence – the wholeness of existence.

You see life from the perspective of the whole. It feels peaceful, fulfilled, and that all the things that you didn't understand before fall into place. Of course that feeling does not hold on all of the time. There are problems that come and you feel agitated and frustrated, but the underlying feeling is that of peacefulness.

There's a feeling that what's happening is appropriate to this time. Appropriate that I am losing my sight, or that I can't walk that far, or that I can't do what I want to do. It's a feeling that that's the way things are.

... People use time to locate themselves. We count on our children and grandchildren to complete our lives. This is the way that most people accept death by feeling that they are represented by their children and their grandchildren, because they can't complete their own lives.

So having no descendents, I have considered my life completed – that I am not leaving my life to be completed by my descendents. Maybe that gives me a different perspective on death, what I have to do and not leave it to somebody else to do it. You have to complete your own life.

... I might say that I am not afraid of dying, but when it comes right down to it, I might be afraid. If you convince your self that you are not someone special that you will live forever, then you are not afraid to die. I am quoting from Suzuki's book, *not always so*. He has a chapter on, 'Sun Faced Buddha, Moon Faced Buddha,' where he comments about death. He says there that he is ready to die and it does not make any difference to him if he lives or dies.

... I am not consistently present. It's a Catch 22. So I feel more peaceful. And all these years of trying to meditate maybe all these years accumulated to make this possible. Life has come full circle for me. It's wonderful to have all these people doing their best.

... This is practice. Old age is letting go of things. And this is our practice here, letting go of our frustrations, worries, and so forth. Everyday life is our practice. We have to cope with things and later we realize what we have learned from our difficulties. So it's such a learning period for me right now. It's an amazing life - absolutely amazing.

... I guess this is my sesshin now. It's difficult, but routine. I do what I have to do each day. One thing is that I am too sleepy to do things. My heart medication slows me down. Like I can't get everything ready to go to bed and get up in the morning. My daily life becomes my practice.

... **[May 1, 2006]** I am so happy to be thinking about this remembrance that I had up in the High Sierras the other day. I visualized how it was and had that feeling of being out there and meeting this polymonium. It's so nice to meet this little flower that is independent and free and chooses to defy that harsh environment.

I also like the freedom and the independence that the High Sierras brought to me. It was fulfilling. It was following a trend or need in me to be independent - to defy the elements and find such a lovely companion there.

It's a kindred soul. I can't imagine why I am thinking about it now. For Marilyn and John, the desert is home to them and I was thinking that I like the High Sierras better. That's my idea where I would like to go and like I said, meeting that kindred soul, that little flower, made my day.

I don't know if I really appreciated it as much at the time as I am now. But I am appreciating the details now. It's interesting. It was wonderful going on to those backpacking trips. You have to put a great effort and you get a great reward.

This flower is sort of famous in backpacking books, because not too many people get to see it. It likes the elevation and the terrible weather. I guess it was sort of midway on the trail.

It's strange that it's more meaningful now than when I saw it. It is something that touched a very deep place in my being. I knew that I loved backpacking, but I didn't understand how it was part of my being, how it was part of the polymonium to be up there and defy the elements.

That's why it came to me now, with very sharp details, because I have done enough thinking to appreciate it. All of our talks prepared me to find how this relates to my being – what I really love to do.

I had to test myself in this harsh environment. It was my nature, like it was the nature of this little flower to grow in this little place. It was fulfilling my Buddha Nature to test myself in this harsh environment. I could not just sit there. I had to test myself. It's like the Buddha Nature of this little flower had to test itself and so I had to test myself too. To complete and express my nature, I had to test it.

In a way everybody does it, maybe they do it by the work they have to do. Each one has different ways of testing themselves. But I had to test myself by climbing the high mountains and there I found in this harsh environment that little flower – that companion soul – that had to test itself as well. That little flower testing itself by living in this harsh environment. It's only found in places that no one else wants to live there. We are kindred souls, because we like that harsh environment.

It's been such a beautiful recollection. It just made my day – actually days now. It opens up why I had to go to such great effort. Backpacking takes great effort. I understand more now why I had to do it. I think poorly these days, but I am remembering these events clearly!

... I guess I am just a floating awareness - just an awareness. Yeah. Remembering back that time when we went up north with that small group and had a couple of days there, in a little redwood grove and we enjoyed that.

'Remember' is an interesting word. Re-member, to sort of put together again - put together with meaning. It's more meaningful. You are more deeply aware of what happened as you did something; what that awareness brought to you. Re-member – put the members together again with more understanding.

... **[May 15, 2006]** This is my Vision Quest, except I am not going anywhere. I don't really get out. Gradually, I am a little weaker all the time. I have little more trouble doing anything. I need to write a note or phone about something and I haven't been able to do it. I have great trouble calling. The only phone number I know is Marilyn's, since she kept my old number. I can manage that most of the time. It's hard to do phone.

I don't have much free time. I am just getting ready for the next event. When I have some, sometimes I lie down with my feet raised and some

times I look out at the marsh. I don't know. So it's been very slow and not very creative lately.

There is a sort of an absence of feelings. I don't feel about things. I just keep up doing, whatever it is I do and I guess I drift with the hour. I am sort of existing, except when someone comes in.

Since I can't read or listen to music, it's hard to say what I do. I feel suspended. I just exist. So it's not exactly productive and I am not actually reacting to things. I just coast. Things just come and go and I am just not very reactive. I'm sort of numb. I just take the pills, which the nurse brings every day, but otherwise, I am numb – just going along and an occasional phone call.

I don't have any pain. I sort of just am here and sleep well. It's also getting hot. I am turning to my summer pajamas. It was uncomfortably hot last night. So I have very little stimulation. It's the same thing every day usually.

I don't have the energy to do more. I am sort of contented to coast along and do the same thing. I am not bursting with energy that has any place to go. I am not exactly just satisfied with the situation. I just do it. It's all I can do.

It's not ok and it is ok. It's just the way it is, without a judgment, whether it's good or bad. I don't have enough to do now. I don't know how I can do it otherwise. So I guess this is a very slow time.

I had no expectations about how this would be for me. I am very well taken care of. I don't know what people can do to make it otherwise. Things are just the way they are. Sometimes it's a little different if there's outside company.

... So looking back, it all comes together. It's all one unconscious pattern. That's what my Buddha Nature wanted to express. It all comes together in one cohesive pattern. It seems so miraculous that you don't know that you are making these choices. But somehow one step leads to the next, because Buddha Nature is planning all this. This is what I had to express.

It's not anything definite or a particular aim, but this life itself. Everyone has something to get out, to do. Their life is their painting, their canvas, and you are making it a little bit at a time. You paint this corner here and then a little something else there and at the end you have this picture.

... I feel that I am meditating more of the time now. I am more able to empty my mind. It's just happening. I am not trying to empty it. It's more like my mind is emptying. I think that it's by breathing that it happens. Read the first lecture in *not always* so, where Suzuki-roshi talks about the breath vanishing. It's more like the breath vanishes. It doesn't feel much of anything.

... It's the time in my life, and with your assistance, that I am finding out that there are things that I do know. So I am connecting things, what Suzuki-roshi says here and there and what they really mean.

It is a great treasure to have somebody to talk to at this time and stimulate my investigation. It's a great gift and treasure. Everyone has to have someone to talk to at this time of his or her life. It's accepting and stimulating.

... Everyone will just remember what they want. I hope I made good impressions on people. But I can't direct it in any way. I hope that they can remember me kindly. I can't say anything to influence them as to how they will remember me. That's done. I have had a marvelous experience and I wish them also the same. Not that it's over now, but I continue to have very nice experiences. And mostly I wish them peace.

I hope that I am leaving some peace behind. I also hope that they can have some peace with themselves - a love and appreciation for themselves and not to be hard on themselves, but to appreciate themselves.

... I hope that, where I have walked, I have left a feeling of peace. What I do on Fridays during the demonstration, is hold a sign that says, 'Peace.' I hope I do that wherever I go all the time. I hope that wherever I go that people feel a little more peaceful, because I walk by. But they have to find their own peace.

... **[May 30, 2006]** I keep thinking of the birds. We have the common egret and that particular one has a special place that likes to stand beside the creek and now somebody told me that there are four of them. They have multiplied. That's the first time in all the years that I've been here that there has been more than one in that particular spot. And I find that quite miraculous. There was one and now there are four of them. They stand up by the creek. I wish that I could see that.

It knows what to do, where to stand, and keeps standing. Each thing has a Buddha Nature to express and that's what the egret does. Some finches are building a nest near Kay's balcony and she sees them bringing bits of material for their nest.

So everything is doing its thing and somehow it all adds up to this wonderful world. Just like the world keeps going on its journey around the sun. Everything knows what to do, except human beings.

It's all happening at once. So we get all worked up as to how terrible this is and that. It's all just happening. I don't get all worked up about the government anymore, because President Bush is following his nature. Maybe we don't approve of it. We sort of live a double life. In our usual daily life we take a stand. But actually there is no right side or wrong side.

If there is anything like right or wrong, the side that says about the well being of the planet, is the right side. But essentially you can't say that this is right or wrong. It's all happening. It's just all is.

I agree with what the Dalai Lama says about the purpose of life. He says that, "The purpose of life is to be happy." So enjoying life is good. There is nothing to accomplish. That's the basic purpose, to have as many people to enjoy life with, as one can. So it's up to each one to enjoy life according to their capabilities and opportunities and all.

I really feel that I have had so many good opportunities and that my eyes were open to what was around. That's sort of the main thing that I was somehow open to take advantage of or to take what the teachers had to give me. I was open to the teachings.

There are things that I have said many times that my mother did not impose any particular belief or approach to life on me. So I was free to explore this wonderful world and make up my own mind. That was just a wonderful thing, because so many people are brought up to believe that this is right and that is wrong. I was brought up to be good to others, as I would want them to be good with me.

I'll just keep going on with this little corner of what is happening, that we call our world...

[This was to be our last phone conversation. At the beginning of July 2006, Betty was admitted to the Skilled Nursing Facility, where she died three weeks later]

Appendix

Harps of the Winds

Written and Illustrated

by

Betty Warren

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Harps of the Winds

Tall trees,
Harps of the winds,
Fanned by gentle breezes
Stand sentinels
O'er the rocky passes
Trode by pioneers
In the ages past.

Men shall come,
And men shall go,
But the immortal trees,
Harps of the winds,
Shall stand sentinels
O'er the rocky passes
Forever, in the ages to come.

Reverie

I stood upon the mountain top,
A cool breeze fanned my brow.
The lake, a gem, beneath me lay,
White clouds sailed slowly by.

I gazed upon a sapphire stream
With trees upon its banks
Bent low to kiss the rivulet
That sang to fairy tunes.

And high upon that mountain top,
 With Nature's work outspread,
 I realized how small man was,
 And great the God of All.

The Rushing Waterfall

I am standing
 By a waterfall
 Watching the waters
 That are rushing
 Down the cataract.
 Watching the waters
 That are tumbling
 In breathless haste
 Down into a restless pool,
 Where treacherous currents
 Swallow bits of wood
 That happen to be caught
 In their clutches.
 I am watching
 And the rushing waterfall
 Makes me dizzy.
 My head is whirling,
 And still the waters
 Fall in a ceaseless torrent,
 Hypnotizing me
 With its noise
 And with the turmoil.
 Yes I dare not look away,
 But must stand
 With whirling head
 Forever!

Sherwood

Sherwood in the mountains,
 Where Nan and I go oft,
 Where stately oaks shed acorns
 O'er the stream between the rocks.

Nan and I play we're the outlaws
 Of sturdy Robin's band,
 Who dwelt in merry England
 When Prince John ruled o'er the land.

On Sherwood's floor's a carpet
 Of grass and soft green moss,
 Where Nan and I lie down to rest
 And dream of Robin Hood.

No one goes to Sherwood,
 No one knows the way
 To the secret playground
 For Nancy and for me.
 Sherwood in the mountains,
 Sherwood in the trees,
 Sherwood in the springtime,
 I hear you calling me.

An Indian's Song

Come with me, where the golden sun
 Lingers long in the west;
 Come with me, in my birch canoe,
 I'll speed with added zest.

Come with me, where the waters blue
 Are still as mountain lakes;
 Come with me, through the forest green
 My true love I shall take.

Come with me, we shall rest beside
 A cooling mountain stream;
 I shall watch, while you softly sleep
 Beneath the moonlight's beam.

Come with me, to the land of dreams,
 And there we shall abide;
 With peace and love and happiness ---
 An Indian and his bride.

The Coming of The Dawn

Tall trees swaying
 Against a silvery moon.
 All creatures sleeping,
 Day will be breaking soon.
 A great owl is hooting
 Breaking the silence gray.
 The hours are quickly passing,
 'Twill soon be another day.

The Mountains in Winter

The clouds are dark.
 The mountains are covered
 By a soft and fleecy
 Blanket of snow.
 The branches of the silver firs
 Are bent low with the weight
 Of sparkling diamonds.

The mountains are silent.
 Even the bold and rushing wind
 Dares not disturb the peace.
 The wolf's cry does not ring
 Through the still, clear air,
 And silence reigns supreme,
 O'er beast and element.

The Wind

Whistling through the great, tall pine trees,
 Sometimes screaming, sometimes laughing.
 Mighty trees bend low before you,
 As you hasten on your way.

A Wooden Monarch

On a hill above the city
 Stands a wooden monarch
 With arms outstretched
 As though to touch the very heavens
 Or the fleecy clouds
 That float so gently by.

I love to lie and meditate
 Beneath this ancient king of trees,
 Who, scarred by time, doth stand alone
 In grim defiance of the elements.

The Ocean

Great waves, rolling in,
 Pounding on the shore with might, with fury,
 Advancing, dancing and prancing,
 Boiling as with irreconcilable anger.

Days are that you are calm and peaceful,
 Rolling gently in, as though time would wait
 forever.

The sun is reflected upon your surface in all its
 golden glory
 And the gulls skim silently o'er the rippling
 waves.

Roll on, Oh ocean waves,
 Roll on in all thy glory,
 Thou mighty, supernatural force,
 Roll on forever in Eternity!

Dawn

Upward, upward, slowly drifting,
 Morning mist is gently lifting.
 Eastern colors quick are shifting,
 Sunlight now will soon be sifting
 Through the clouds so slowly drifting
 In the cold and silent dawn.

Thanksgiving

The autumn leaves are falling,
 All nature is in rhyme;
 The harvest crops have ripened,
 It is Thanksgiving time.

The turkeys proudly strutting
 About the farmyard say,
 "We soon shall grace a table
 Upon Thanksgiving Day."

The yellow corn is gathered,
 It lies in heaps of gold;
 And we shall celebrate with joy
 Thanksgiving Day of old.

Our pilgrim fathers, long ago
 Their westward way did wend;
 Three hundred years since heavenward
 Thanksgivings they did send.

Oh let us now with swelling hearts
 And joy that we do live---

Oh merrily, yes merrily
Thanksgivings for all give.

The Song of a Mountain Stream

I wander on forever,
Rushing down the mountain side,
Dancing, laughing, stopping never,
Over hill and dale I glide.

Evening

I had wandered far that day,
And now the night was falling.
Twilight lingered
On the distant, snowy, crests,
And slowly,
As though loath to leave,
The crimson faded
From the mountain tops.
Trees towered
Far above me.
The shadows deepened.
The cold wind
Gently swayed
The great pine trees.
The call of a wolf
Came from the distance
And died away.

Night had come,
Quietly,
On the shoulders of Time.
A golden ball was seen,
Rising,
Flooding the forest
With a silver light.
I stood in silence,
And the light of the moon
Played on the waters
Of a placid lake.

I stood entranced,
My arms out-stretched,
Forgetting all else
In the beauty of the scene.

Ode to the Wild Horses

A gallant horse stood on the plain,
 Flung to the wind was his flowing mane.
 His broad, white back was large of girth,
 Firmly he stood on the sweet green earth.

Waiting for his comrades of old
 He flung to the wind his challenge bold
 And bounded away with toss of head,
 Wishing, wishing for playmates long dead.

Oh that those horses, wild and free
 Might on those rolling plains still be,
 Racing with all the winds that blow,
 Like the wild horses of long ago.

Tropical Night

Long peaceful nights
 Underneath a tropical moon,
 Palm trees are swaying,
 Night will be over soon.

Long peaceful nights,
 To the harmony of a guitar,
 Beautiful nights of sailing
 On lagoons, 'neath the silver stars.

Pan the Piper

As through the forest shades I strolled
 Upon one April day
 I came upon a wooded dell
 That sensed of some entrancing tale.
 I peeped within, and there beheld
 Among the moss and lacey ferns
 The piper Pan, who sweetly played
 Some tune of long ago.
 He heard my footsteps, though so faint,
 And scampered like a frightened deer.
 I waited long for his return,
 But still no piper came,
 And so I slowly turned towards home;
 I did not hear sweet Pan again.

The Sea

I stood beside the sea,
 Beside the open, rolling sea,
 Where the cold wind blew,
 And the gulls cried mournfully.
 The clouds hung threateningly
 O'er the restless tide,
 As the waves beat wildly
 'Gainst the bleak and barren shore.

A Mountain Night

Towering above me, the great gray cliffs rose, and
 disappeared into the darkness, standing sen-
 tinels o'er the narrow valley.
 The stars danced on the ridges, playing with the
 golden moon, twinkling with merriment and
 laughter.

The tall trees swayed as the wind whistled through
 the branches, and a lone bird, circling above
 the tops of the highest trees, wailed discon-
 solately.

The Prairie

I stood on a prairie, a windswept prairie,
 That was out where the cactus blooms;
 I stood there for hours, I know not why,
 Just dreaming, just gazing
 Out on that prairie, that windswept prairie
 That was out where the cactus blooms.

Stretching before me, behind me, around me,
 Was that endless desert, that windswept desert,
 That desert where cactus blooms.
 Far up above me, like gems in the sky,
 The million stars of the desert were shining
 Down on that prairie, that windswept prairie,
 That was out where the cactus blooms.

Waiting for the Sunrise

As I sat, waiting, upon grassy lawn,
 Just as the stars were beginning to wane,
 While the trees murmured in that time before
 dawn,
 Expecting, I waited for night to be gone.
 Watching, and waiting for that light divine,
 Watching and waiting, it seemed for all time,
 'Til the world would be bathed in that light
 sublime
 And I could behold the world that was mine.

Silver Rain

Oh, the silver rain is falling,
 Tiny drops are slowly crawling
 Down my frosted window-pane.

Oh, the winter winds are blowing,
 But my fire is always glowing,
 So cheerful's my refrain.

Night Falls on the Desert

Out in the desert, bleak and cold,
 Watching the wind carve the cliffs so old,
 Watching the cliffs, colored red and gold;
 Serene is the desert, bleak and cold.

Grand cliffs in the sunset, made aeons ago,
 I sit there, enraptured, behold and lo!
 The sunset colors, as I watch from below,
 Fade from those cliffs, made aeons ago.

Gray clouds in the darkness, bleak and cold
 Slowly encircle the cliffs so old,
 The desert is gloomy, no longer gold;
 Night falls on the desert, bleak and cold.

Sleep

A soft, lovely spirit of the darkness
Smooths the wrinkled frown from
 care-worn brow.

She lightly trips to and fro
And wafts on gentle breezes
Sweet dreams to the fretful babe.

 sweet, O Sweet is Sleep,
Who, with her soothing lullabies,
Brings to man a realm of peace,
 and sweet serenity.

More poetry

[On Wednesday, February 2, 2002, Betty said farewell to her home in Sausalito. This is what she read at the small ritual that she, Marilyn and John Hendee had at her home]

Good-bye, dear house. You have served me well.
 For more than half my life you have been my home.
 You were a Gift, a Blessing.
 And so I pass you on to my dearest friends
 To be their home in your new incarnation.
 I hope they will be as happy here as I have been.

Your gifts to me are numberless:
 Solitude, meditation, peace;
 My window on the world,
 My refuge and shelter,
 My sustenance, from the bounty of your gardens,
 My connection to the Earth, its Wisdom, its awesome beauty;
 The place where I could grow in love and creativity
 And relationships with my fellow travelers;
 The place where I found the Vision Quest.

Wonder at the miracle of life, joy in simply being
 feeling the presence of the Great Mysterious
 all around us
 in the daily chores done lovingly
 in a hug, a smile, an appreciative word
 in other living creatures and things that do not appear to be living
 in the great forces of nature.

There are many ways up
 the mountain

There are many paths to the
 mountain top

Any will suffice
 For those with open hearts
 Who pause to look and listen
 on the way

To the Desert Paint Brush

The desert cried to Mother Earth:
 Please send us a painter with a brush
 To bring bright color to this land.
 And so the Scarlet Jester came
 To offer its flamboyant flowers
 To the wind and sand.

To the Evening Primrose

White primrose – Why do you unfold
 Your fragile petals for a single day
 On this dry and desolate ridge?
 The flower said, “I came to pray,
 To lighten the lonely vigil of the rocks
 And cheer all travelers on The Way.”

The Words have all been written
 What remains is the Living
 In the Here and Now
 Simultaneously
 In the Heaven and Hell
 Of Existence

The Words have all been spoken
 The Books have all been written
 What remains to be done
 Is the Living
 In the Here and Now
 In this Heaven/Hell
 That is Existence

Meditation
 Is Learning
 To Be Peace
 Even as you sit
 On a Tinder Box.

YOU ARE FREE TO DIE
 WHEN YOU KNOW THAT
 EVERYTHING
 EXISTS HERE AND NOW
 IN THIS MOMENT
 COMPLETE
 JUST AS IT IS
 AND AS IT SHOULD BE.

The Guide

Unseen, unheard, unfelt
 Yet ever present
 It guides us over dark pathways on the mountain
 To the light beyond

Who is this Guide?
 None other than our Buddha Nature

December 4, 1984

O beloved master
 We are so grateful
 That you gave us
 No glib answers
 To the eternal questions.

Instead
 You showed us
 How to practice The Way
 In our everyday lives.

So now that you have gone
 You are not gone
 But in your boundless compassion
 Continue to teach us
 Day after day.

December 1985

Beloved master
You are still with us.
Every morning I offer you
Candlelight and incense
And the Heart Sutra.

When I ask for instruction
You smile raise one eyebrow,
And say, "Just sit."
I am so thankful for
Your love and guidance.

December 1988

Dear Suzuki Roshi
Every day my gratitude deepens
As you continue to open my eyes
So that with poet William Blake
I begin to see
 a world in a grain of sand
 and heaven in a wild flower
 hold infinity in the palm of my hand
 and eternity in an hour

December 20, 1992

I am so grateful every day
That you are still with me
You are my guide in the darkness
My inspiration in the light

December 1997

Although you are long gone
 You are still here beside me
 My teacher my inspiration
 On the long journey

We are so grateful for your love
 That brought you here
 To show us The Way

Like the blossoms in Spring
 We are at once ephemeral
 And eternal
 Arising from the Earth
 To return again
 In the circle of Love

[This is Betty's last poem – May 2006]

After days of struggle and effort
 We rest on a crest on the John Muir trail in the High Sierras
 Eyes look out on a vast panorama
 Snow-capped peaks and bottomless gorges

But there is another miracle at our feet
 We see a small plant in the shadow of the bank
 It is a polymonium
 A white blossom snuggles against the bank

It chooses to live in this harsh environment
 It grows no other place
 It defies the elements and lives and chooses this inhospitable place
 This tiny white blossom

Meditations before the Vision Quest solo

I.

“Whatever your age, now is the time to wake up.
 Look deeply into the mirror – beyond the ego...and know that This is It.
 Unlike the ego, with all its shortcomings,
 insatiable desires, fears, self doubts, judgments,
 The true self is perfect – you are perfect.
 Just sit as you are now, and as you are unfolding.
 Your being is essential to the mysterious functioning of this universe.
 So find the joy of simply being.

So love your self, love your body – your home,
 your temple in this life.
 Love your self, and let the love spill over
 onto everyone you meet
 and to all those others you will never meet
 even those your rational mind calls evil.
 Let your love go out to every plant and animal
 including the rattlesnake, the mosquito, the poison oak,
 to every landscape on this living planet Gaia.
 And to the farthest star in the farthest universe.

We must return now – to plan ahead
 to consider our expectations.
 Let us be flexible and realistic so as not to be disappointed.
 Be aware: your angel may come disguised as a hailstorm,
 a cactus spine, a cup of tea.”

II.

“Sometimes we feel like yo-yos.
 Who is pulling the string?
 Capricious fate, ego, self?
 How can we take control?

On the solo you will be alone – means all alone –
 at one with your own essence – an opportunity.
 We psychoanalyze, vent anger at fate, parents, others, confess sins, ask
 forgiveness, count blessings, pray to become a better person.
 We finally feel empty and exhausted.
 All this is necessary but still we feel out of balance, something is missing.
 What is there left to do?
 Perhaps we were talking so much that the Great Spirit

couldn't get a word in edgewise to answer us.
 All of our doing has not brought a vision.
 There is only non-doing left to try.
 Non-doing – plunging into ourselves instead of sending out messages.
 Listening to the answers from within us – the Source
 From the Great Silence – the sacred void
 the womb of stillness from which we are reborn
 over and over again.

What is the language of trees and rocks?
 Where do we transcend words and receive the wordless?
 To learn to listen.
 It will take time – the rest of your life – and patience.
 Begin by quieting the mind through meditation.
 Surrender the ego, to the formless – ride the waves instead of fight.
 So, breathe gently, navigate around or through your thoughts, feelings...
 until you find the silence.
 Ignore the chattering mind.
 Dive in deeper...
 Let it permeate – become the Silence and know everything is all right.
 Know that you are Peace.
 Know you are Love.

We will travel, climb mountains
 seeking what/who we already have.
 In the beginning the Gods were wondering,
 where to hide the most precious of gems and hid it in our hearts.
 We set out on our journey with fears and expectations.
 Expectations can be great.
 But the truth is so simple, so ordinary
 that it will not be recognized.
 So be open.
 Let go of your fears, and your hopes, desires,
 denial of your mortality, anger, judgment, discrimination,
 greed, guilt, feelings of worthlessness, sinfulness, inadequacy.
 Let love unfold – not passionate attachment
 but unconditional love and acceptance
 of all creation, acceptance of self.
 And gratitude for this consciousness, awareness
 of the miracle of life.

Live each day.
 Live each day as if it were the last
 in joy and gratitude.
 Do not expect a miracle – it is already here.
 This is not a task for a week but for our lifetime.

If you think you have found the truth,
remember you will have to find it
anew tomorrow.

Clean the house and throw out the garbage again and again.”

III.

[Every trip, before questers left for their three or four-day solo fasting experience, Betty would pass out one plump raisin to each person and would say the following]

“So you thought you had had your last meal – but here is one more to share, before you go out for your solo. Please take one raisin, but do not eat it yet. Just hold it in your hand. Note the weight, softness, texture, smell, and color. Is the raisin our self? Not now perhaps but it soon will be. You may put it in your mouth now. Roll it around, bite it gently, savor it slowly, observe.

Where did the raisin come from? It is the fruit of a vine, planted in the Earth, nourished by the soil, energized by the sun, bathed by the rains, fanned by the breezes, pollinated by insects. When we eat the raisin, all of these things become ourselves. We are not separate beings. There is only co-arising, inter-being.

What am I to do here on this Earth? Meditation is a very useful tool in this quest. It can be sitting still, letting the mind become empty. Or it can be walking slowly, aware of every step touching the Earth. It can be letting your self be open to communicate with the grass, the trees, the water, the breeze. It can be any activity where you are intensely aware of your self and your interaction with your surroundings.”

Obituary

The San Francisco Chronicle

Thursday, August 3, 2006

Beloved friend, teacher, political activist for peace and the environment, and poet, Catherine E. "Betty" Warren died of natural causes on July 30, 2006, at The Redwoods, a retirement community in Mill Valley, CA.

Born September 17, 1916 in Los Angeles, to Hildegard Cordes Warren and William Henry Warren. Betty attended UCLA and then UC Berkeley where she earned a B.A. in 1938, and then an M.A. in 1955 from San Francisco State University. She taught JR. and SR. high school math and science in Oakland for 31 years, 1944-75.

Upon retiring Betty increased her work for peace and the environment, organic gardening at her Sausalito home, backpacking, and her study of classical music. In 1959 Betty met Shunryu Suzuki-roshi at the Academy of Asian Studies. He became her Buddhist teacher and she began 47 years of daily meditation. She then helped found the San Francisco Zen Center and was a regular contributor to the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center, the Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, and Tassajara Zen Mountain Center.

At age 70 Betty went on a week long wilderness vision quest with a 4-day solo fast, and liked it so much joined with the leader, Marilyn Riley [now Marilyn Hendee], to form a non-profit company, Wilderness Transitions Inc. From 1986-2002 Marilyn and Betty lead 60 wilderness vision quests for 400+ clients in the California and Nevada mountains and deserts.

Upon moving to The Redwoods in November 2000, Betty was an active member in Seniors for Peace, and taught meditation. Betty is survived by a cousin, Dorothy Cadien of San Pedro, CA, and many friends including Marilyn and John Hendee who served as her local immediate family.

A memorial service honoring Betty's life will be held August 23 in The Redwoods auditorium, 40 Camino Alto, Mill Valley, CA. at 7:30 PM. The service will begin with a simple Buddhist ceremony led by Kwong Roshi (Roshi meaning Zen Master), of the Sonoma Mt. Zen Center, a long time friend of Betty's (46 years). Following the ceremony there will be time for sharing memories of Betty, and then refreshments.

An email from an old student of Betty's

I was one of her JR. High School students at Hoover JR. High School. She indulged and supported my interest in science...I was always getting into everything. It is hard for me to pin down the year...1960 or 1961.

When I graduated from JR. High School, she asked me if I had the money, what would I buy. At that time I wanted to be an ichthyologist...we call them marine biologists these days. I told her that I would like to get a saltwater tank and a seahorse or two.

She took me to an aquarium store, and bought me the tank, the seawater, and two sea horses. It came to a sum of about \$50.00. In those days, 50 cents was a fortune to me.

I have always thought kindly of her, and the positive influence she had on me. I think of all the incredible things I have done, and when I do, I always hear her words of encouragement and support, as well as chastisement when I went astray (which was often).

I have this philosophy, which I think she may appreciate. I think of a quiet brook, surrounded by trees, which cast a cool shade in the surroundings. The sun will occasionally shine through the trees, creating a mix of light and shade. The brook is quiet and clear, and at the bottom, about a hand's depth, are all kinds of smooth stones...all of different colors, shapes and sizes.

Now imagine a hand holding a stone just above the water...the fingers gently release the stone, hits the water and makes a splash...sending waves across the water.

The stone, from the time it leaves the hand to the time it hits the water, is our life span. The waves that ripple across the water is the impact that person made on each of us.

Some people make big splashes, only to have no impact at all. Others make waves that affect all of us, often long beyond their life spans. Beethoven, Milton, Bach, Einstein, Archimedes...have an influence on our lives to this day all to positive effect. Others make waves that have a destructive impact on our lives...I think it would be a disservice to mention their names.

The question will be, what kind of lives will we live, and what kind of impact will we have when we finally depart?

Very certainly, Miss Warren had a positive effect on me, and will continue to have an influence on me for all my days.

With warm regards,
Stephan

My last good-bye to Betty

In all the years that I have known you
 In all the years that we have been together
 I don't know of any other time than now
 That I finally get what you have been for me

You have been my mentor, my teacher
 And above all my friend
 You would sit quietly there listening
 With such attentiveness that I felt I was the queen

You have prepared our lunch with such care and love
 That your very gestures in putting the knife here
 The fork there, the plate somewhere in the middle
 Made me feel loved, happy, and cared for

Your humble being and strong heart have taught me
 To venerate everything that my eyes fall upon
 Because that is exactly who I am –
 That preciousness - the All

The timelessness that resonates through and through
 Your being, my being
 And that of All
 Yes, we are that

Thank you for exemplifying that

The point of existence itself in all its nakedness, roughness, and
 Oh, so exquisite loveliness

Lovingly,
 Nitsa

