



December, 2000

Dear Wendy and Bob,

My ex-husband said I reminded him of Lucy. He identified with Charlie Brown. I think I know what he meant. These days I feel more like Snoopy--especially when it comes to writing.

In the spring Jack and I drove to Seattle in our Ford truck to visit my sister and one of my twins and her husband. The Alaskan camper that Jack rebuilt is now a permanent part of the rig. It worked out great. I wouldn't mind driving with it as far as Fairbanks, though I doubt we'll ever get that far from home. Jack enjoys preparing for journeys almost more than taking them.

We traded in our tiny trailer for a larger, newer model and he'll be spending most of the winter adding personal touches and conveniences to it. We plan to drive south to see the rest of our family members this spring. We were both impressed that you drove all the way from coast-to-coast and back last summer in your Toyota Tercel. We inherited a 1980 Toyota Pickup from Jack's father who inherited ^{it} from his brother and it still has only 44,000 miles on it. It's our town car and uses about half the gas as the 3/4 ton pickup.

The hot (tub) house replaces the old one that Jack converted into a temporary bath house in 1993 when we moved to Crescent City to take care of Jack's father. He designed and built the new one

out of PVC plastic pipe and fiberglass roofing. Lying in the hot tub is like bathing inside a translucent dome under a tropical sea. The smell of exotic incense and the sound of meditative music on a portable tape player creates an atmosphere of "transcendental tranquility."

My zen practice (meditation/journals/letters/everyday life) unfolds at a leisurely pace. In your 1999 holiday letter you asked me if I make back-up copies of my manuscript to keep at a safe location in case of flood or fire--or if I don't live long enough to finish and publish the book. (I'm pushing eighty but can hardly believe it. In many ways I'm in better physical and mental health than ever. I attribute this to my regular periods of morning meditation that keep body, mind and spirit flexible and centered.)

At this point it isn't practical for me to make copies of finished chapters of my book because of the way the project is developing. While I work on a new chapter I'm constantly stuffing notes in the folders of earlier chapters: important additions, revisions and clarifications.

I do have a literary agent, Elizabeth Pomada, wife and partner of Michael Larsen who was my agent on The Zen Environment. They are based in San Francisco. Elizabeth is a patient woman who understands and encourages my unorthodox approach to writing.

A couple of years ago I realized that I needed to include other practitioners in my project in order to keep my focus from becoming too exclusive. I've developed a nucleus of a small circle of seasoned practitioners who correspond with me regularly by letter. We share our personal and meditation problems and encourage each other when we get bogged down. I find their specific questions and challenges motivate me to search for deeper levels of understanding. Although Elizabeth Pomada doesn't practice meditation she says she likes the idea of teaching

through letters and asked me if she could join this little group.

Prompted by your concern in protecting the work I've done in the last few years I decided to concentrate on Part II of the book instead of polishing up Part I. Part I is Zen Teaching; Part II is Zen Practice; Part III is Zen Life and Part IV is Zen Science. This will enable me to pass on the core of the alternative teaching by sharing my discoveries and insights with other practitioners long before the entire book is finished. This group doesn't need the philosophical and historical background I discuss in Part I--mostly for beginners. Seasoned practitioners can jump right in to test the merits of the alternative practices themselves. If something happened to prevent me from completing the book I will have passed on the most important part of the program. Someone else might be moved to pick up where I left off.

After the holidays I plan to send you copies of a couple of letters written to two of my "Zen pals". They will give you a better idea of the kinds of dialogues we have with each other and explain a little more about the program. If you are interested, when I'm ready to mail out the introduction to and instructions for the first section of the four-part meditation program, I'll send you a copy. I'd love to have your input even if you aren't moved to try out the exercises. This section is on breath work. I've been concentrating on breathing for the better part of a year, researching Yoga, Chi Gung and Zen practices and trying out dozens of traditional exercises, modifying some and creating others. I've winnowed these down to a fifteen-minute warm up for sitting meditation.

Take good care of yourselves,

Marian