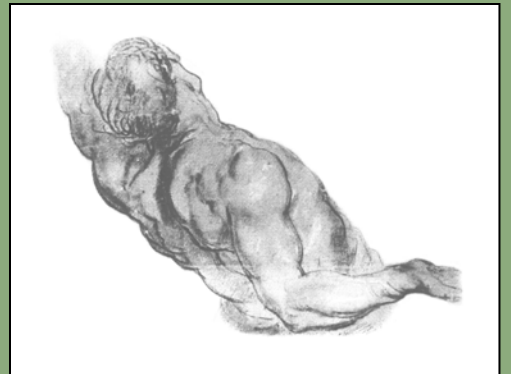


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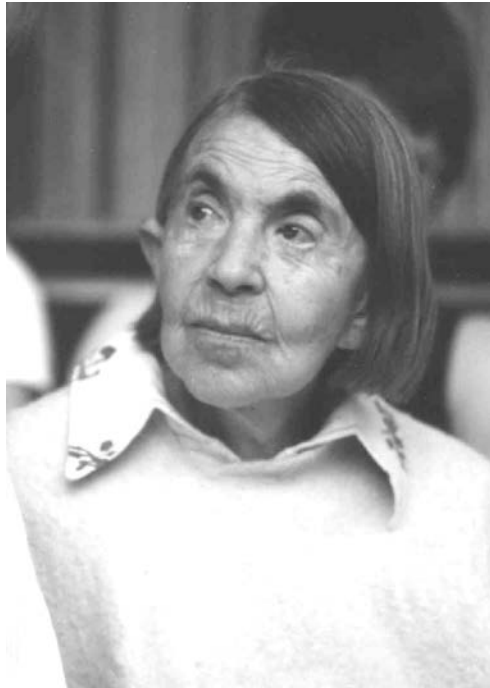


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## Charlotte Selver

Born April 4, 1901 – Ruhrort, Germany  
Emigrated to United States - 1938  
Died August 22, 2003 – Muir Beach, California

**“Becoming more and more able to be there in situations, whether easy or difficult; to be more there with our mind, with our hearts, with our sensitivities, with our strengths - this is very, very important.”**

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USABP Mission Statement

The USABP believes that integration of the body and mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end, its mission is to develop and advance the art, science, and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical, and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity.  
(revised October 1999)

# Interview with Charlotte Selver

## John Schick

### Abstract

In this interview Charlotte talks about the necessity of the work of Sensory Awareness being involved in the world situation. She cites the importance of differentiating between sensations and emotions and describes some of the strong influences she received from Elsa Gindler.

### Keywords

Elsa Gindler – World – Communication - Differentiating

This interview was conducted with Charlotte at her home in early June, 1987, two months after her eighty-sixth birthday. At the time, she had just finished conducting three-month study group at Green Gulch Farm in Muir Beach, California. As I talked with her, she was preparing for a trip to Europe two days hence.

*Schick:* This spring you've celebrated your eighty-sixth birthday, and I'm wondering, do you sense your approach to the work maturing or changing in any way?

*Selver:* It changes every day because it's no method, it's always meeting new whatever reality brings, whatever at the moment is acute. But I do think that the enormous difficulties in the world situation, the problem of starvation, the political injustices, the persecutions and all that is happening now, has augmented my desire to let people open their eyes and open their hearts for others in the world and become active in that what is necessary today. I do see the danger that when people become very involved in studying breathing, for instance, or becoming quiet, that this will become their world, so that they lose connection with all that is happening in the world, and by that narrow their own viewpoints and their participation with life.

*Schick:* Has this become a deep concern of yours?

*Selver:* It's my concern and I try as much as possible wherever I can, during the work to find ways to let people feel what is happening in the world. For instance, I have sometimes taken articles from the newspapers which describe a condition in a certain country and I ask my students to read it and to feel what they read. I have tried to open their hearts for what is happening with the hope that it is in some way possible for them that they become active and play a positive role in the world, instead of just keeping their attention on their study and in the narrow room of their friends and interests.

*Schick:* Do you consider this development of a person's responsiveness toward all life to be an important aspect of this work?

*Selver:* This is what the work is about. When one studies human nature and really experiences what is given; when one takes it seriously to see, to listen, and to feel, then it is obvious that the wish will come to contribute to a world which makes it possible that more and more people can be open for what they experience, and lose their aggressions, and feel with others, and listen to others, and speak their mind, and act their mind. The greatest influence on me was the way Elsa Gindler lived. She was there for everybody. She was conscious of the influence which poverty and oppression had on so many people. The way she went through the Hitler time; working; hiding people who were persecuted, sharing her very meager rations with them, helping them to get out of the country, even at the risk of her own life, all this has been working in me.

*Schick:* Are there any other changes in approach which you notice?

*Selver:* Yes, it has become more a question of communication, of the quality and clarity of communication. One very important part of this is that people speak directly out of their experience and not speak *about* what they experience. But that when they speak, they relive their experience, and by that the way of speaking becomes more direct and more precise, more fully backed by their experience. One of the things which is difficult to bring about is that people learn to differentiate between sensation and emotion. Most of those who come to our work have been in psychoanalysis, or have worked with psychotherapists, and they slide very easily into the emotional experience rather than into the sensory experience. So to keep the keel straight is very important, that people don't mix it up. Of course, very often, in a sensory experience, emotions come up and they should not be suppressed, but one would have to feel the difference between the two.

*Schick:* Have the kinds of people who come to study with you changed over the years?

*Selver:* Oh, yes. When I first started out in New York, I often had people come to me who had kinks in themselves. Now, most people come because they are interested in the work itself, and they come to see how far they can trace their own abilities.

*Schick:* What would you say are some of the important questions which occupy you now concerning the work?

*Selver:* How it is that we can help people to become more awake, and how, after they begin to wake up, they learn to trust their own sensations. And how it is that they can discover they really can see, and hear, and sense; and that this alone can be a very powerful agent in one's life. One can learn not to restrict one's view; to feel oneself as a member of this planet we all live on. It's important that people learn to stop circling around themselves and instead to become open to the world and active. When I started to study with Elsa Gindler, I was very deeply impressed by her including the whole cosmos in her work. She made us conscious of the fact that every person has his potentials, and how very important it is that we make it possible that more and more people can develop these potentials.

*Schick:* This is a theme we keep returning to; it's clear that this whole question of a person's responsiveness to the larger world in which she lives is a very important one for you.

*Selver:* **Yes, it's extremely important.**

*Schick:* Why do you think it is that this responsiveness is lacking in so many people today?

*Selver:* Many people feel they are too weak for such a task, but in the moment in which a person wakes up and becomes more ready, and by this I mean more willing, they will discover in themselves a boundless amount of energy. So the work is partly to discover what amount of energy is needed for every given task and to allow that this energy can be expressed unhindered. This is what it means to be potent. And this potency goes hand in hand with seeing more, hearing more, feeling more, and being more in touch with what happens. Some people think that they get so sensitive they can't stand it. You realize that one **can** stand it? But this has something to do with being able to stand. People have usually learned from other people what to think, and we are not going this way because we feel that the person has all the abilities to find out for himself. He doesn't have to look to other people to be told what is right. This possibility of discovering gradually that one can trust one's own reactions can be a very powerful event.

*Schick:* So, you try to provide your students with questions, which they must investigate on their own?

*Selver:* Yes, that's right. This is very important, this is the only way to create a healthier society. The basis in our work is that when one gradually begins to go into each activity anew, one loses one's habitual stance. And this approaching each activity anew means a person who is awake and changeable. When one becomes more awake, when one loses one's restrictions, the organism becomes a very movable and elastic entity. The more one loses the tendency to protect oneself, the more one becomes trustful of one's own abilities... with all this comes movability and elasticity. So that one does not always tot into the old horn, but rather learns to approach every situation anew, more and more new, so gradually as people are more with what they are doing, they become more reactive. The tendency to withhold gives up by itself. No one has to do it, it happens on its own.

*Schick:* So it's partly a question of becoming more awake, of becoming more responsible. . .

*Selver:* The first thing is one must have occasions to discover that one can trust oneself.

*Schick:* Do you try to provide such occasions in the classes?

*Selver:* **This is the practice.** While people are attending to the given task, the attitudes which they bring with them clearly show. At first, only other people see it, but by and by, people feel it themselves, and then they discover how they acquired these attitudes; most of the time it's something they acquired long ago. It takes patience and time to discover what the gesture says. For instance, the gestures of people who always want to be graceful, this kind of false gesture [indicates gesture], or people who are afraid, or aggressive, they discover it in themselves. When I am used to shouting and then I begin to hear, to listen, my voice lessens because it's not necessary to shout on every occasion. It's not always agreeable what one finds. It's a beginning of a new beginning. It has nothing to do with criticism, or feeling guilty, or anything like that, but just in quiet and openness to feel what belongs to the moment and what doesn't. I remember when I was, for the first time, with Gindler, I was just a guest, and she asked, "Do you feel that you are going through space?" "Do you feel the air around you?" "Do you really want to jump?" "Do you use the floor as a springboard?" I had been studying gymnastics and had never heard such questions. I was amazed! In my studies up until I met Gindler, I had been learning something entirely apart from reality. I

was taught certain things and I learned them, but I never came more in contact with my environment and my own inner capacities and so on.

*Schick:* So for you it all started with Gindler . . .

*Selver:* The very first time I visited Gindler and heard her ask questions of her students, I realized this was the work I had to go into.

*Schick:* And you are still working at it in your eighty-sixth year.

*Selver:* I am fascinated by it. It's my dish.

#### Biography

**John Schick**, student of Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks is now a licensed psychotherapist. He lives with his family in Muir Beach, California.

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