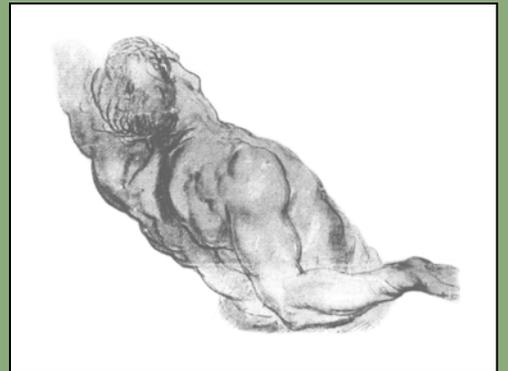


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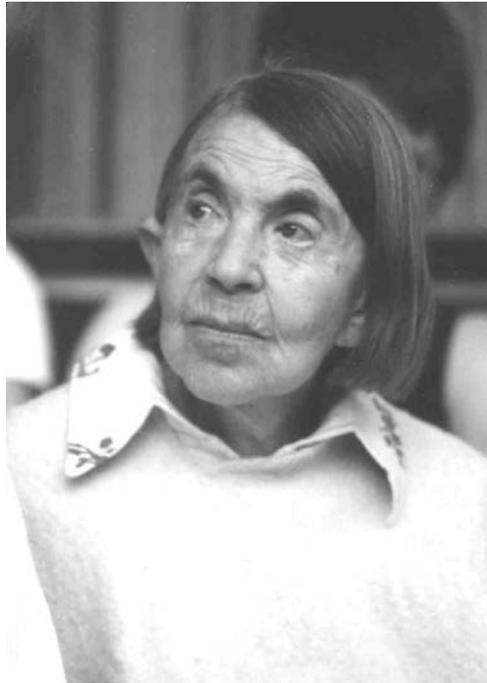


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## Charlotte Selver

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)

# Charlotte Selver in 1965

## Peter A. Levine, PhD

### Abstract

The author describes his first, and only, experience in a workshop with Charlotte Selver and the unexpected and immense effect it had on him. He credits her work with informing his development of Sensory Awareness.

### Keywords

Body Awareness – EMG – Relaxation – Organismic Understanding – Somatic Experiencing

I first met Charlotte Selver in 1965. She was giving a workshop for a group of Zen students at the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. The year before, I had come out to California as a graduate student in Medical Biophysics at UC Berkeley. My friend Jack brought me to the workshop, telling me it was about “body awareness.” “What’s that?” I asked, not knowing, quite frankly, that I even had a body. After the first few hours I found it weird; during the next few hours I found it tiring and boring (As did some of the Zen students, I later found out.)

It seemed ridiculous to be picking up rocks and feeling them, feeling their weight, shapes, textures; feeling my feet contacting the ground...and on and on. But then after many hours of frustration, she had us lie on the floor to feel our breath (this I was able to do!) and then she asked us if we could “feel our feet breathing”, (from ridiculous to bizarre, I thought). But then a minor miracle occurred. I not only felt my “feet breathe”, but soon I felt my entire body breathing. Eight hours later I left the church and gazed across into the San Francisco skyline. Everything sparkled with life. I had never felt nor seen anything quite like that before.

This previously unknown feeling seemed to last for several days. When I was asked, that semester, to teach a course in the Natural Sciences, I hooked one of my eager students to a plysmograph (a device that measures respiration), and then also measured EMG (small electrical firings in various muscles, including the feet). I discovered that when I was able to “put” my young, fiery, red-haired sophomore student into, what I imagined, was a similar relaxed and alert state as I had experienced with Charlotte, there was a dramatic modulation, a rhythmic “coherence” between the electro-muscle activity and her breathing. When she felt frustrated, as she and I frequently did in this endeavor, there was no such coherence. This new organismic understanding informed my work in the next decades; in the development of Somatic Experiencing<sup>®</sup>, a somatic approach to the healing of trauma my experience with Charlotte echoed ever present. And some years ago we both presented at a somatic conference and I noticed that our presentations overlapped. I contacted the conference organizer ‘threatening’ to leave if they did not change my time so that I could attend her presentation. At that time I gave her a copy of my book (“Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma”) and thanked her for her inspiration and contribution; I thank and honor you Charlotte Selver.

### Biography

**Peter A. Levine** received his PhD in medical biophysics from the University of California at Berkeley, and also holds a doctorate in psychology from International University. He is the developer of “Somatic Experiencing” and teaches trainings in this work throughout the world and in various indigenous cultures. He has been stress consultant for NASA in the development of the first Space Shuttle. Dr. Levine was a stress consultant for NASA on the development of the space shuttle project. He is a member of the Institute of World Affairs Task Force of “Psychologists for Social Responsibility” and serves on the APA “Presidential Initiative on responding to large scale disasters and ethno-political warfare.

Peter is the author of the best selling book [Waking the Tiger - Healing Trauma](#), available in eight languages as well as three audio learning series for “Sounds True”: “*Healing Trauma, Restoring the wisdom of the Body,*” “*It Won’t Hurt Forever, Guiding your Child through Trauma,*” and “*Healing Sexual Trauma-Transforming the Sacred Wound*”

Peter is the Director of the Foundation for Human Enrichment and may be contacted through [www.traumahealing.com](http://www.traumahealing.com).

# USA BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL

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