

December 2002

Dear Wendy and Bob,

We think of you often, especially when we are watching the weather channel and see that your part of the country is getting snow. We've been having spring-like weather for the past month--dry and mild although we had one three-day rain storm to dampen down the forests and gardens. Thanksgiving I packed a picnic lunch and we drove the Ford with the camper up the south fork of the Smith River into the mountains about 20 miles. We parked in a clearing of what used to be an old gold-mining claim and got out our beach chairs and sat in the warm morning sun until we were so relaxed we decided to take a nap, lulled to sleep by the sound of a creek. After our nap we ate our lunch and felt really thankful for our good karma that allows us to live so close to the ocean and the mountains where we can find an isolated spot without driving for miles through city traffic.

I'm writing this letter on my new WordSmith typewriter/word-processor combo. My third basic Smith Corona plain electronic typewriter wore out. The first passed away suddenly when Jack and a friend (who we thought knew what he was doing) were rewiring the house with a separate line for a generator to use during power outages. The friend had wired his house for a generator but it was a different voltage. Live and learn. The other ~~two~~ died slowly after transplants by Jack from parts from the others. This time, when I tried to replace the typewriter, I was told the company no longer made a basic model. So I bought the combination with the small screen where one can type in the word processor mode watching about three words at a time show up on the screen. The typewriter/word processor is the same size as the old typewriter so it will sit on my 12 x 29 inch typewriter table.

I always have to consider size when it comes to the equipment I select for the corner of our living room which I call my "office". Our home has just one small bedroom, a small kitchen, a laundry room and a small bathroom. My son has tried to talk me into letting him buy me a computer and can't understand when I try to explain that reaching the goal (finishing my book and getting it published) is not what I'm interested in or writing about. It's about finding the goal here and now in this moment whether it's writing by hand, with a pen, or on a typewriter or laptop computer. As I creep along at my snail's pace I begin to stumble on the answers to the questions the instructions didn't cover. I'm enjoying the process of developing a relationship to my new partner.

This year I got a hearing aid (which I use mainly for listening to TV or on the phone, and I had four teeth pulled and replaced with a bridge, and had the cataract removed from my right eye. I'll go in and have the left eye done the day after Christmas. I'm getting overhauled for my 80th birthday in March. Plan to live at least another ten years and hopefully long enough to finish my book. (I just noticed that I set the line space for 2 instead $1\frac{1}{2}$ when I left off yesterday and picked up again today.) Jack is keeping busy working on the property, landscaping areas around the house and cutting and stacking cords of wood that should last us a couple of winters. We took one trip south to his home town in Moro Bay, California and reburied his parents ashes in a beautiful cemetery between Moro Bay and San Luis Obispo where most of Jack's relatives are buried.

Have you read the new collection of Suzuki-roshi's Zen talks? ^{1.} They were culled from the last two years of his life and ^{edited} by Ed Brown (author of the Tassajara cook books.) He, and several other of Roshi's senior disciples did a beautiful job of putting together the collection. I'm almost finished with my second reading and have found so many teachings in it not only encouraging but inspiring. I feel often, in these talks (all new to me) that Roshi is speaking directly to me and reassuring me that I'm on the right track, especially in the chapter titled "Enjoy your Life". The words wouldn't have meant so much to me if I'd heard them thirty years ago when I was still practicing traditional Zen meditation, following the footsteps of the Buddhist ancestors rather than being guided by an intuitive compass: exploring rather than following a map.

Here are a few of the passages that resonate with me: "The only way is to enjoy your life. Even though you are practicing zazen, counting your breath like a snail, you can enjoy your life, maybe much better than making the trip to the moon. That is why we practice zazen. The kind of life you have is not so important. The most important thing is to be able to enjoy your life without being fooled by things." ^{2.}

Ever since I became a beginner-again and made my morning meditation my first priority I can say that my life has been enjoyable. Not that I don't have many frustrating and many

1. NOT ALWAYS SO: Practicing the True Spirit of Zen, by Shunryu Suzuki, edited by Edward Espe Brown.

confusing and many emotionally painful moments, but I can see them now clearly as opportunities to practice, to allow them to run their course without trying to escape them.

Here's another: "My talk is just to encourage your practice. You cannot follow it exactly, but maybe it will give you some suggestion." ³. That is the spirit I try to express when I describe my more structured approach, that I believe is more appropriate for most contemporary zen practitioners in this very distracting culture. But I'm trying to leave plenty of space for those who might want to try this approach to use the synchronized breathing exercises as a kind of place to start on their own exploration of the Zen spirit within.

Here's one last excerpt from NOT ALWAYS SO: "The more you practice zazen, the more you will be interested in your everyday life. You will discover what is necessary and what is not; what part to correct and what part to emphasize more. So by practice you will know how to organize your life. This is to observe your situation accurately, to clear your mind and to begin from your original starting point." ⁴ "No, I want to add just one more quote because when you put them all together they say something more than when they are separated by other thoughts. "I came to America because in Japan I had too many problems. I'm not sure, but perhaps that is why I came to America....Now I have very different problems than I had in Japan....I am a Japanese and I have many Japanese friends here, so I have the problems most Japanese have, in addition to other problems. Sometimes I wonder what I am doing here. But when I know what I am doing clearly, without any overestimation or underestimation, very honestly, and truly, I do not have much burden on my mind. Zazen practice has been a great help. If I hadn't been practicing zazen I wouldn't have survived in the way I did." ⁵.

And now I see that's it's so easy just to ramble on and on with the word processing mode of the new machine that my letter has gotten so long that it won't fit into the Christmas card and I'll have to put them both in a manila envelope. You probably already have read NOT ALWAYS SO, but if so I suggest you read it again in the next year or so. I think you will find many passages in it that didn't stand out on the first reading applying directly to your own situation. I've found, when reading books on Zen, that it helps bypass my critical rational mind and be absorbed more directly by my intuitive mind if I read only one chapter an evening, and before starting to read to empty my mind by five or ten minutes of meditation (counting breaths, following the breathing or some of my synchronized breathing exercises.)

Hope you all are healthy and happy and enjoying your lives.

Love,

Marian (Jack says "Hi")

2. p. 25
3. p. 102
3. p. 43
4. pp 45-46.