

Samantha Thompson

Funeral Service

Saturday, March 05, 2011

Funeral Service for Samantha Thompson

Minister Graylin Ross' Introduction

We have come together to celebrate the life of a beloved friend Samantha, and to express our deep gratitude for the privilege of having shared our lives with her. Every student shapes the school through their being and presence. Samantha played a pivotal part for us; she was a cornerstone of the School and her dedicated, sincere and practical influence raised all of us. She changed us. For many of us in this room today, we can note that we are now near the age of Samantha, when in our youth we first met her. We cannot imagine our lives without this woman's unheralded example of how to be. Regardless of when we may have come to know Samantha one could say that "Here was someone to know, here was someone to love." Her devotion and generosity to Influence C, our beloved Teacher and fellow students was ever apparent. She was able to become one of the first long-term residents of the Teacher's former home the arduously relocated Blake Cottage where innumerable times she hosted evenings of good food and spirits, great poetry and drama, and beautiful music which could serve to form life-long bonds of knowledge, friendship, love and the burning desire for presence

A letter she wrote to the Teacher after his Crystallization breakfast in 2005 was as follows; "This morning at your crystallization breakfast I became acutely aware of my incredible good fortune of being near to you for thirty-two years and being a witness to the school's ever-expanding knowledge that is being brought to us through your precious love. This past year I have been inspired more than ever. I love the wisdom of the Sufis, they speak to me personally and help me appreciate the afflictions of old age. I know I am winning, not in spite of them but because of them. One of my favorite angles from Rumi is, 'Pain is a treasure for there are mercies in it. The kernel becomes fresh when you scrape off the rind.' To the extent of my being, I love you."



Let us stand for a few moments and honor Samantha with our silent presence.



At her death, we can see Samantha's life as a whole, her life's accomplishments, the things her hand touched. But ultimately, her life cannot be measured by any external facts or accomplishments. At death, it is clear that only a great, central, internal accomplishment – the accumulated moments of presence – is truly significant.

The Teacher said, "When C Influence enters our lives, we are given the task to live forever." The particulars of our days; the efforts we take upon ourselves; the people we touch and who touch us; these are not who we are. The play is given to us so that we may become immortal. Samantha completed her play to perfection. She can say, "*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*^Ω."

As Samantha returns unencumbered to the divine source, let us remember that we share the same passage. Death is not the end of life. As death occurs, life continues into another phase, the phase of the soul. We follow, and are even now following, in her footsteps.



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Margaret Mitchell: *Robert Burns*

O, wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
And ev'n Devotion!

Oh would some Higher Power gift us
To see ourselves as others see us
It would from many a blunder free us
And foolish notion.
What airs in dress and gait would leave us,
Even at our Devotion

Music: *Where you Walk* (Olga, voice, Marina, piano)

Eulogy (Jeanne Chapman)

During the past couple of years I have taken some notes of conversations with Samantha, and today I hope to let her speak in her own words.

Samantha was born in Dundee, on the east coast of Scotland, in 1927. She trained as a nurse and worked in Scotland for some years. When she was still a young woman she moved first to New York, then later to Los Angeles. She often said that as soon as she landed in California, she thought, "This land is my land!"

When Samantha had been in Los Angeles for only a week or two, she heard that Victoria de los Angeles was singing in Aida. She went to the theater to buy a ticket and there were none left, not even for standing room. She said, "There must be some way I could see it," and the ticket agent said that she could apply to be an extra. So Samantha made her entrance onto the Los Angeles stage, bowing down in blackface and chains, as one of a line of Ethiopian slaves in Aida. That story makes me think of the picture she kept by her reading chair. It was a reproduction of the six bowing Persian angels, and she said she kept it there to remind her to be more humble.

She established herself in Los Angeles, and as the 1960s unfolded, California entered its golden age of B Influence, and Samantha was in the heart of it. She became one of the regulars at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, driving up there from Los Angeles nearly every weekend for a couple of years. Esalen introduced her to almost every form of B Influence you could find at that time. (This would have been about the same period that Robert met his teacher, Alex Horn.)

But by 1969 Esalen was changing, and many of the prominent figures were moving away. Fritz Perls asked her move to Canada with him to form a community there. She said, "I remember it so clearly. We were sitting on a wall together at Esalen, and I said, 'Fritz, I don't feel like I'm the one controlling my life right now.'"

This was a kairos time for her. She said, "I thought Esalen was IT, and when John Lilly and Fritz left and it broke up, I was very depressed. I drove away for the last time and thought, what am I going to do now? And then suddenly I had a very clear perception, an

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'I' said, 'It will come, it just hasn't come yet.' And then I knew I was on a path, I just had to wait, and I met the Fellowship."

That was in 1973, in Los Angeles, and she was 46. She never looked back. She said, "Once I joined the school I never had any doubt. I knew it was the real thing."

A couple of months after she joined, an older student said he thought she had experienced too much B Influence to be able to stay in the school. She said, "Well, we'll find out, won't we?" And we did find out. For the next 38 years Samantha helped build the school, becoming part of what we are, part of the fabric of the Fellowship.

After she moved to Apollo she continued working as a nurse at Rideout Hospital until she retired. At that point she went on salary, and she said that she had never worked so hard in her life as she did after her retirement. For several years she worked at the Pressroom, helping produce the Renaissance Journal. She established our libraries here and was always working to improve them—she loved buying books. She worked in the Donations Octave for many years. And in the last years of her life she worked—in her own way--as Kenneth Wygal's secretary -- just a few weeks ago she was standing in line at the DMV, registering Fellowship cars.

She never had much interest in roles or in being someone important in the school. Any way that she could serve was fine. Her effect on us was not so much in what she DID as in what she WAS.

She was so remarkably consistent. It wasn't a question for her to go or not go to meetings and dinners and events. If she could go, she went, until she couldn't go any more. It's hard to think of anyone who participated more fully in everything that Apollo and the school have to offer.

She had a genuine and unaffected love of the arts, particularly music and literature. There was no personality in it—it was what she liked to do. She knew how to find higher hydrogens and use them for her work. She had a questing mind and read widely—Sufi poetry, the Hindu sacred texts, books on quantum physics, on Gothic architecture. But it was always Shakespeare she came back to. Reading and watching Shakespeare was as natural as breathing for her. She shared her love for him with many of us—often hosting video evenings at her home, and working as part of the Shakespeare research team. The evening before she died, she was speaking with some energy about a scholarly biography of Shakespeare that she was reading. She said, "Now I feel like I almost know him."

Her mantra for the work was "keep it simple," and she would always photograph us if we became too complicated about the work. She would say, "You just have to be present—that's all. Keep it simple." In the same way, her second line was very direct—she didn't beat around the bush. Last Saturday night she had a few students at her house for margaritas and guacamole, and when a student expressed a self-deprecation 'I' she responded, "That's just your vanity, you know!"

She was so honest about her own experience of the work. She had a great dislike of esoteric pretension. There is the story that Robert so often tells—one day when she was going to work in the hospital she went in through the revolving doors and said, "Today I am really going to remember myself." And at the end of the day, as she went out through the revolving doors, she thought, "Oh no!"

About a month ago she said, "The other day I had that heart pain and I thought, maybe this is it. And even then, it's amazing, I was going into imagination. So I just tried to

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work with my breath, follow the breath, and that worked better. It's so hard for the machine to hold presence, but that is all right. That's the way it is. You just have to accept it."

She was completely dedicated to her teacher—not in an identified way, but as a student who was drawn by what he had achieved. She would say, "I want what he has."

She said, "I never asked Robert questions—I already knew what he would say—remember yourself. What else could he say?"

Another time she recalled, "Once I was at a dinner and a student asked Robert a "why" question. And Robert doesn't think that way—it is C influence and he just follows it. And I jumped in the way I do and said, "Robert, I was just reading someone who said, 'Asking why is like pouring water into wine.'"

Last Saturday night, the students toasted to Robert, and Samantha pointed out a photo of him hanging on the wall above her head, then another on the table in front of her, and then two more in other parts of the room. When she was not able to dine with him as frequently, she said, "It is all right, I don't need to see Robert so much. I have him here [touches her heart]."

III. OLD AGE AND DEATH

She was quite free of self-deprecation, self-pity—all the "selves". She really had no use for self-preoccupation of any kind. She was an active type with active features and she could be judgmental and impatient with people. But as she grew older she was more accepting. She had a strong sense of C Influence and an understanding that our plays are written. I remember her saying recently, "People just have to experience what they have to experience."

With old age and illness she was sometimes irritable, but she didn't complain. More and more, she accepted that she couldn't be as active and productive as she had always been. She said, "I don't feel old. The machine gets old and it's frustrating, but you have to get rid of the frustration. You just do what you can do. You downshift—I used to always be in fourth gear."

Towards the end, she faced death simply and honestly. Once, when speaking of her inability to "do much of anything at all", she said, "C'est la vie," then stopped, laughed, and said, "No, c'est la morte!"

About death, she said, "I don't have any fear. It's the end game. It must be a good thing to die. You read it in the Sufis, in the Bhagavad Gita—you're going through the veil!"

Three nights before she died she had a hard night and couldn't sleep. She said, "I was just lying there, and I thought, 'Time is breath,' and I was taking as many wordless breaths as I could. Time is so strange, you know. It's all just illusion anyway. I'm a little better now. I'm going to put a log on the fire. You have no idea what a big deal that is for me!"

She had lunch with friends last Sunday afternoon, and an hour or two later she quietly died, in her usual no-fuss manner, sitting alone in her easy chair, surrounded by her Shakespeare books.

When Robert heard of her death, he said, "Without death, we couldn't go forward."

Samantha lived her life so completely that she lived it out, she was ready to move on.

And in some mysterious way, because she has moved forward, we are moving forward, too.

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She had a great impact on us by being so fully what she was—without apologies or excuses or pretense. She wasn't interested in the past, and I never heard her express a regret about anything. She had the gift of enjoying the present in essence, and she shared that gift with us all.

These very familiar words from Hamlet seem so right for her:

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Musical Interlude: Danny Boy (Larisa, harp)

Catherine Lambert: *William Shakespeare, The Tempest*

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Minister Graylin Ross' Conclusion

Only the death of the body allows entrance to a higher world, and into which, nothing mortal can pass. The sequence of events of one's life comes to an end and the *purpose* of one's life – the very reason we were born – comes into being: silently, an immortal soul ascends. By our presence, we honor Samantha's transition.

The Teacher commented that Samantha, to date, has had more years working with Influence C than anyone else, and she took full advantage of her time¹. To follow her example is our finest testament to her.

Minister: *Shakespeare*—

“I can no other answer make but thanks,
And thanks, and ever thanks.”

Samantha, we thank thee.

¹ Requested by Robert.

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Minister motions to Brian who walks to the back of the table, picks up the urn and stands holding it. Jeanne walks over and stands with Brian. Minister joins them and extinguishes the candle. They then begin the procession from the Prytaneion to the cemetery.

There will be a toast to Samantha here, at the Pytanaion, after the internment at the Cemetery. Those not going to the cemetery, could you please remain seated?

At the Cemetery: Minister's Introduction

We are here today in this beautiful March day to release Samantha, by returning her ashes to the earth.

Helaine Feivelson: *Bhagavad Gita, Krishna counseling Arjuna:*

You grieve for those beyond grief,
and you speak words of insight;
but learned men do not grieve
for the dead or the living.

Never have I existed,
nor you, nor these kings;
and never in the future
shall we cease to exist.

Just as the embodied self
enters childhood, youth, and old age,
so does it enter another body;
this does not confound a steadfast man.

Indestructible is the presence
that pervades all this;
no one can destroy
this unchanging reality.

Our bodies are known to end,
but the embodied self is enduring,
indestructible, and immeasurable;
therefore Arjuna, fight the battle.

Music, *Bach Sicilienne from the 2nd sonata (Ania, flute)*

Brian Carolan places the urn in the ground. The minister picks up a basket of rose petals and places some in the grave and offers them to Brian to also place in the grave.

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Minister's Conclusion

Here, the earth returns to the earth and the divine spark returns to its divine source. In Rabia's words, "Love comes from eternity, and goes into eternity". The circle of life is complete; from birth to death to birth.

Minister hands baskets of Rose petals to two friends who offer them to friends to place in the grave and the leaving begins.

Prytaneion: Toast by Benjamin Yudin to Samantha

From Hamlet; "Now cracks a noble heart. Good-night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"