

Elizabeth Alstadter
August 24, 1950 – November 30, 2017

Funeral Service

Saturday, December 9th, 2017

At the Cemetery, Minister Graylin Ross's Introduction

Dearest friends, here in this sacred place, made holy by those here present, and by those whose bodies lie here, we witness the completion of a divine cycle, the life of our beloved friend, Elizabeth. Here, we release Elizabeth to hers, and our true home, even as we return her remains to the earth from where it sprung.

Reading: Richard Wilbur, Digging for China, read by Lucretia Fligner

“Far enough down is China,” somebody said.
“Dig deep enough and you might see the sky
As clear as at the bottom of a well.
Except it would be real—a different sky.
Then you could burrow down until you came
To China! Oh, it’s nothing like New Jersey.
There’s people, trees, and houses, and all that,
But much, much different. Nothing looks the same.”

I went and got the trowel out of the shed
And sweated like a coolie all that morning,
Digging a hole beside the lilac-bush,
Down on my hands and knees. It was a sort
Of praying, I suspect. I watched my hand
Dig deep and darker, and I tried and tried
To dream a place where nothing was the same.
The trowel never did break through to blue.

Before the dream could weary of itself
My eyes were tired of looking into darkness,
My sunbaked head of hanging down a hole.
I stood up in a place I had forgotten,
Blinking and staggering while the earth went round
And showed me silver barns, the fields dozing
In palls of brightness, patens growing and gone
In the tides of leaves, and the whole sky china blue.

Until I got my balance back again
All that I saw was China, China, China.

Minister

The earth returns to the earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, as we look toward eternal life.

Urn is lowered. Funeral party place rose petals into the grave.

The rose is the handmaid of love. A rose is perfect in every moment of its existence. By placing rose petals in the grave, we mark the triumph of love.

Rose petals into the grave with everyone.

Minister's Conclusion

A divine flame returns to its divine source. The circle of life is complete. We part, so that we may meet again.

Let us withdraw to the Festival Hall for a service in honour of our Beloved Friend Elizabeth.

At the Festival Hall, Minister's Introduction

Dear friends, welcome. Welcome Mike and Dede from the community – thank-you for coming.

We are gather together to honor and celebrate the life of our beloved friend, Elizabeth Alstadter.

Let us stand and remember our friend in silent presence.

Silence

Thank you, please be seated.

Here we are; at this point of transformation, because when the difficult threatens to overwhelm us, we make efforts to escape through the spirit. Elizabeth's life is an example of a migration from the physical. So we honour her efforts, her life and her loves.

From all our efforts, the living tree of our school grows. The lifetime of each student, in creating their real Self, raises our School, enriches our lives, and leaves a legacy that we admire, in all humility.

Our Teacher says, 'Ascending souls finish their roles very well prepared, having received the presence allotted to them in this lifetime.'

Elizabeth is an example for all of us. Her return to the divine source reminds us of our own journey. Her valuation reminds us to treasure this mystical journey of life.

Reading: Emily Dickinson, read by Ruth Atkins

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away

My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Music: Amazing Grace, performed by Sharon Shelton and Justin McKay

Eulogy for Elizabeth Alstadter, Michael Lester

When Elizabeth joined the School, what she found, what she noticed first, was Love. She found Love in the students of the San Diego Center. The time for her had come, as John Milton writes, 'When men with Angels may participate, and ... your bodies may at last turn all to Spirit'.

Elizabeth was born in Michigan, near the city of Flint, an only child. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in English.

It was in 1974 in San Diego when the door opened for Elizabeth. On the other side stood John Graham. He was wearing memorably plaid pants. Jan Allen, who is sitting over here, and is one of Elizabeth's closest friends, was the co-director of the center with John.

Elizabeth was part of the first wave of students who joined the School in the 1970's. It was a Kairos time. A time of exceptional opportunity. Its spiritual values shaped the course she followed to her forty-fourth year of being in the School.

In the early 1980's, Elizabeth relocated to the San Francisco Center and in 1986, she married Jeffrey. They went to Paris on a 'working' honeymoon. Jeffrey was astounded as he came to know more deeply the woman who had married him: no demands, generous, kind. "Elizabeth is a gem," he said, with no trace of over-emphasis.

Elizabeth's career tracks made headway into multiple occupations- a school teacher, waitress, court-reporter, medical transcriptionist, a sales-person in various industries. One constant persisted: "Elizabeth was good with people."

Through inner flexibility Elizabeth acquired this hard-won, transcendent wisdom: the way you end a job is how you start the next one. How you end is how you start.

Elizabeth had a rare combination of being both unselfish and persistent. As friction with jobs and health became unrelenting, Friendships made all the difference to Elizabeth. Friendship helped Elizabeth stand up to adversity; she was happiest with her friends around her.

On Tuesdays, Jan, Linda Joudrey, and Elizabeth would meet over a cup of coffee and read poetry at Apollo d'Oro. Elizabeth was an interesting conversationalist, and her ability to express an author's meaning without over-emphasis won the respect and attention of her listeners. Her enthusiasm for reading- Whitman, Hafiz, Shake-speare, influenced her friends positively towards further readings of their own.

Elizabeth and Jeffrey formed a side business selling used books in support of the Apollo Bazaars. They would go to library clearance sales, and pay local teenagers to help lifting and carrying the heavy book boxes.

When Jeffrey found an employment contract in India, Elizabeth flew out to join him and they helped establish the center in Bombay. It was quite a trial, founding the center, and brought them a closer and more enduring friendship with Christopher King.

As with many students, Elizabeth's contributions to the School were mostly behind-the-scenes. She enjoyed the theater and appeared in some minor roles at Apollo; *Measure for Measure* and *Twelfth Night*. She was a stage manager for *Oedipus Rex* and *Trojan Women*. She was a good and patient coach for Gwendolyn and Ann Nielsen in helping them learn their lines.

During the 1990's, Elizabeth and Jeffrey bought land and built a house at Apollo. Their architect Dennis Brunner helped them through several tough intervals during building, and when Jeffrey thought maybe they could not finish the octave, Elizabeth was assertive and found a way to see it through.

Because of the friction from building the house, they sought mediation from a marriage counselor, Walter Friedman. He recommended an enduring recipe for renewal: Go out for dinner and talk about something else.

For ten years Jeffrey commuted to Sacramento for the work week and for ten years Elizabeth made Jeffrey's meals for the week on Sundays. Every Wednesday, she visited Jeffrey in Sacramento. All the while, she contributed a second income. Their accountant pointed out one year that her small efforts had made a significant difference to their finances. Which surprised Elizabeth. But that was because she often gave herself too little credit.

In 2000, Elizabeth was diagnosed with Parkinson's. This disease took a lot from her over the next seventeen years. She accepted the shaking symptoms, the palsy, without self-pity, and according to her closest friends, with almost no complaint. Eventually she could not sit through meetings, and watched them at home on video. She broke her leg, her arm. She had sciatica, three brain surgeries. For one surgery, there was no anesthesia so that she could answer the doctor's questions in response to moving different parts of her body. Most people with Parkinson's are not eligible for these operations because they are so physically demanding.

Elizabeth never gave up. She wanted to get up by herself, without help. Even when she could not get out of a chair, she would try her utmost to do so. Then, could not get out of the bed. Meantime, her courage sustained her effort to not express negative emotions. She never became crabby. She kept going right up to the inevitable end.

Her essence did not show despair. Her essence shone through when she made jokes, when she made her friends laugh. Her illness revealed her character.

To one friend she said, "I want to live as long as I can because I want to self-remember. I want to be close to C Influence."

Elizabeth knew who her Teacher was. His influence was the source of her great valuation. He suggested that she study the role of Elizabeth the First. Robert also suggested that Elizabeth and Jeffrey should visit Greece to appreciate the beauty of its classical antiquity. It was a trip that changed Elizabeth's life. Her work opened to, became re-oriented, to the scale that art can signify in the accelerated evolution of an ascending soul.

On the afternoon of our last visit, Jeffrey, Laura, and I gathered around Elizabeth's bed, as she lay in a coma. We chatted, glad to be together, telling our memory stories of Elizabeth. Although it was not easy for her to come out of her coma, the first thing Elizabeth did was disarm everyone with her warm, irrepressible humor. The flow of friendship around her revived Elizabeth. She made

memorable, prolonged eye contact, despite her body's weakness. As we prepared to leave, Elizabeth somehow communicated that Jeffrey needed to be with friends. Unselfishly, looking beyond her own problems and her pain, she externally considered Jeffrey. She was utterly lucid. I told her how very beautiful she was, a paradox in that situation, and that her soul seemed very ripe to me. Elizabeth put 110% into being present. She put aside all other business that merited less concern. Her honesty and singular focus on being present bore witness to a very high degree of school work. A great demonstration about the very deep nature of Elizabeth's relationship with Influence C, and of Influence C's relationship with her.

It may be said, on behalf of Elizabeth, without a chance of one shred of hyperbole, that pharaohs for such a tomb would wish to die.

Music: Offenbach, Tales of Hoffman, by Zoila Munoz & Agnes Cartry

Reading: Walt Whitman, read by Gwendolyn Marks

Darest thou now, O Soul,
Walk out with me toward the Unknown Region,
Where neither ground is for the feet, nor any path to follow?

No map, there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.

I know it not, O Soul;
Nor dost thou—all is a blank before us;
All waits, undream'd of, in that region—that inaccessible land.

Till, when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds, bound us.

Then we burst forth—we float,
In Time and Space, O Soul—prepared for them;
Equal, equipt at last—(O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil, O Soul.

Minister's Conclusion:

An ancient king said, 'I am but a child in the eyes of the Gods, yet without ceasing, day and night, I act in harmony with heaven.' Elizabeth now has her part in the light that beckons from above. She joins a new succession in the celestial world, made lovelier still because she bore her part, and by her example, changes us all for the better.

Dear Elizabeth:

May the fortitude in which you faced your trials help us find the strength to bear our own.

May your tender, loving connection to your friends and all students move us to care more deeply for each other.

May your loving attention to your Teacher inspire us to 'listen and act' as well.

Dearest Elizabeth, we thank thee. Now and forever.

Candle ceremony

'Our body is just a shell, our soul will continue.'

Extinguish and light the candles.

Please stand.

Funeral procession, to the reception area.