

Letter from the President – April/May 2022 Bulletin



*Sheila and Zoe - Masterclass 2016
Photograph by Yukimi Annand*

As our guild experiences the unfathomable loss of its founder, Sheila Waters, I have decided not to focus on her portfolio or her career.

I would rather highlight the depth of her character and the philosophy of her instruction.

A product of a strong and supportive matriarchal upbringing, Sheila was imbued with an inherent curiosity, perspective, shocking forthright honesty, and an uncommon urgency that would later mould her to become a comprehensive mentor and calligraphic paladin.

She was a woman of pattern, color, and structure in everything she did—the clothes and jewelry she wore, the intricate illustrations she rendered, and her compositions of lettering and calligraphy. For her, necessity dictated resourcefulness, and so form had to follow function as well. She could be a rebel in spirit and nonconformist underneath the surface. I personally regarded her as being alchemical. She embraced adaptation and evolution. She did not shy from exploration and experimentation to exact the result she sought, even during an earlier traditional era when this attitude was certainly not encouraged. She never allowed herself to be ‘married’ to the *initial* concept of anything. She would redo layouts, shift elements around, and remove entire sections of her mockups to create a stronger artwork. This carried over into her daily life as well: anyone attending her Saturday and Master classes would see her habit of changing around the furniture and studio space frequently.

As artists fiercely protect their finished work and often do not divulge trade secrets, it is stunningly remarkable that Sheila was as ‘open-source’ as she was. She believed it imperative to avail her home, studio, and working spaces to myriad students hailing from all over; as well

as sharing her binders, original notes and sketches, books, and collection of other calligraphers' work—because she felt that being a genuine artist did not result from constantly overworking a situation into lifeless tedium. The brain must be fed and be allowed visual inspiration.

She advocated holistic practice and study. *'Practice smart, not hard,'* she would often state. *'Don't do page after page of the same letter... write out words and sentences. Get a sense of the spacing and rhythm. Put your letters into context.'*

Sheila was the consummate instructor who could address the absolute beginner as well as the most seasoned calligrapher. Her unique range of knowledge and history brought a freshness and richness to what she taught. She was never a 'do as I do and say' type of instructor. Not only did she provide exemplars and ductus and anatomy of different hands, but she also made sure that students were given the tools to analyze calligraphy for themselves. She felt that having this approach would enable calligraphers to also modernize classic hands for current use without compromising their integrity.

Certainly, she will be missed terribly, memorialized often, and remembered with the greatest fondness and sense of wonder. Now it is up to us remaining to pass all this forward whenever we can, in whatever small manner we are able.

-Tamara Stoneburner