

## Sangha Voices: Clare Walker Leslie

CIMC has a rich history of practitioners, teachers, staff and volunteers all committed to practicing meditation together in community. Sangha *Voices* is way for us to deepen our connections, and to get to know one another better. Over the next months, we'll be interviewing members of each of CIMC's many Community or Affinity Groups. These Groups provide regular opportunities for both new and experienced practitioners to participate at the Center in the company of others whose life experiences may be similar to their own.

This month, Zeenat Potia spoke with **Clare Walker Leslie**, a community member of **CIMC's Elders Sangha**. The Elders Sangha provides space for people ages 65 and up to explore both the challenges and sources of inspiration that enrich the process of creative, conscious aging. The group is led by Olivia Hoblitzelle and Betty Burkes and meets the second Tuesday of each month from 10:30am to 12:00pm.



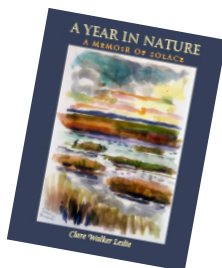
*Photo: Clare with a nature journal*

### ZP: How did you hear about the Elders Sangha?

**Clare:** I joined CIMC back in the fall of 2007, having heard about the Center through a friend. I had known Olivia Hoblitzelle through the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, and I was thrilled when I found out that she was teaching at CIMC.

### ZP: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

**Clare:** I'm a wife, a mother, and I have two granddaughters. I live in Cambridge and rural Vermont. Since 1980, I have written 13 [books](#). I have a great passion to connect people to nature through teaching, drawing, writing and being outside. I am learning together with my students, and I tell them you can find it in your own backyard, you don't have to go to Mt. Kilimanjaro. I've kept 56 nature journals out of which comes all of my own teaching. My studio is Mt. Auburn Cemetery, and my meditation is not sitting on a cushion. It is just this. Being with nature.



### ZP: What purpose and value does the Elders Sangha provide to you?

**Clare:** It's an opportunity to be with Olivia. I find her extremely thought provoking. I'm 73 and before I was in the group, I had read her book, *Aging with Wisdom*. I find it invaluable to have a community of people get together and really talk about aging not in a terrified way, but rather an understanding and accepting way. I've already had several friends join the group. I'm

not there to escape. I'm not there because I have a lot of social problems. I'm not there to feel better. With the Elders Sangha, it is the companionship of someone on the same path. And it is time that I set aside for me.

### ZP: How do you view aging?

**Clare:** It is so cyclical, just like nature. The challenges can seem greater, when people are dealing with health challenges and so on, but I try to balance it all by the haikus I live with. In my books, I speak of them as daily exceptional images. There are many in this ever-wondrous world of nature, just beyond us right here, right now. That moon last night; this morning, birds at the feeder.

### ZP: Who or what is inspiring you currently?

**Clare:** On the teaching side, I appreciate Larry Rosenberg's wisdom and intellectual guidance. And what is getting me through this sometimes-bleak pandemic is my day-to-day connection with nature, even if it's just outside my window. Birds at the feeder, snow falling down, colors of the sky. It is forgetting the 'I' and looking out to 'that' which we are connected to. When I'm drawing, I'm completely unaware of myself. That is my meditation. It's what's keeping me going, deep into my soul.

### ZP: Thank you, Clare!