



The History of New Age Sedona

by Toraya Ayres

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The author, **Toraya Ayres** is now retired and living quietly in the Northwest. For information about her and her other writings, click [Here](#). You may email her at torayaayres@yahoo.com.

For people who would like more information: The *Sedona Historical Society* has a copy of *The History of New Age Sedona* plus copies of the original letters sent out by the author, responses and other materials sent to her by key people, the story of how and why the History was written, various clippings, profiles and articles, and a film made at the Grand Opening of the original Center for the New Age in June 1994 celebrating the move to new quarters. The Sedona Historical Society intends that these materials be available for research. For information on accessing them visit www.sedonamuseum.org (the contact is historian Janeen Trevillyan). *Sedona Public Library* also has a copy of *The History of New Age Sedona* for people who would prefer to read it in book form. Northern Arizona University has a copy plus other New Age materials in their Special Collections and Archives section.



Toraya Ayres

This is history as told by local people; images and memories from a small group which provide vivid glimpses of the unique lifestyle of New Agers in this remarkable community. Through their eyes we see the changes over the years. Many other people, just as worthy, could not be included. Responsibility for errors or interpretation belong to the author. Communications regarding Sedona's New Age history are welcome.

Introduction

In January 1993 I awakened one morning with a clear message in my head: Go to Sedona and start your life over. I was living in northern California and had never been to Sedona but a friend had piled her belongings onto a pick-up truck the year before and vanished into the desert. We only heard of her indirectly after that. She had had some extraordinary experiences, rumor said, and changed her name.

Sedona had a mysterious and magnetic reputation. You could see the stars clearly at night there, I was told, and sometimes UFOs. Nine months later, I had given up my job in Berkeley and moved to Arizona's high desert country. My experience of being called was not at all unusual. Local author Tom Dongo's book *The Quest* tells the stories of many others.



Uptown Sedona with beautiful red rocks in background



Coffee Pot Rock in West Sedona

Sedona is a small town of approximately 10,000 population. Add another 5,000 for the nearby Village of Oak Creek. In the few years since my arrival, three new stoplights have appeared along Highway 89A and another on Highway 179, making a grand total of six. There are seven new movie theaters, Red Rock High School has opened, an Actors Repertory Theater group has formed and there is an international Film Festival each year. Those are only a few of the changes. A constant increase in traffic, new homes, timeshares, and businesses brings up serious issues regarding the pace of development. There are major controversies in town as to how plans for land, water, sewers, drainage and roads should be handled.

At least 176 New Age oriented businesses are located in Sedona and Oak Creek, over 200 if other nearby communities are included: Jerome, Cottonwood and Prescott. The local breakdown includes 16 audiovideo companies, 21 publishers, 5 publications, 14 retailers, 39 sidelines (manufacturers of a product) and more. These figures do not include any of the numerous holistic health practitioners, psychic readers, channels, sacred Earth tour guides or other individuals engaged in New Age service activities.

Sedona is shifting from an earlier identity as an attractive writers and artists colony and a good place to retire, to the broader role of world service. Approximately four million tourists come to experience the special beauty and energy of the red rock formations. Many come to seek a spiritual experience, to enjoy the creative arts, to connect with alternative healing practitioners, local products and services. Tour groups arrive throughout the season from all around the world.

The Chamber of Commerce handled 443,000 requests for information on the telephone or in person in 1996. Members of the Chamber estimate that up to ten percent of these people inquired about the vortices or New Age activities. This is probably an underestimate of New Age interest because a Northern Arizona University study of visitors done in 1995 at two different seasons of the year showed that 64% of Sedona's visitors were seeking a spiritual experience. Forty-two percent said they wanted to visit a vortex area.

Local New Age authors, artists and musicians have their books, prints, paintings and recordings sold around the world. The Energy Mastery School founded by Dr. Jaffe in Sedona now offers training all over the USA and Europe. New Editions International, also founded in Sedona, has a database of New Age oriented businesses with information from 67 countries on it.

Sedona as a Sacred Place

Sakina Blue Star, a local woman of Sioux, Choctaw-Cherokee and Scottish heritage, says the Sedona area, once called Nawanda, was traditionally sacred to all tribes of Turtle Island (North America). From all over the continent Native Americans would come for a once-in-a-lifetime journey to seek a vision of what the Great Spirit wanted for their lives.

The area was known as an interdimensional portal. Star People were said to have touched down in ancient times. It was easier for them to come and go here because of the special energies and frequencies. Native Americans kept their contact with other



the special energies and requested Native Americans respect their sacred sites. Galactic peoples secret for centuries but now some of them have begun to share their knowledge.

In ancient Lemurian times, Sakina says, Sedona was an island, the Crystal City of Light. People came even then for spiritual enlightenment and learning. Clearly, Sedona has been a center for spiritual seekers for a long time.



Spiritual symbolism in pictograph form



Native American Pictographs in the Sedona area

Since the New Age movement has no central organization, it is not possible to define the phrase in a way which will be acceptable to everyone. However, it can be loosely defined as referring to all of life as sacred and the experience of life as a spiritual journey.

Nicholas Mann, a British visitor trained in the European Geomantic Tradition, wrote a fascinating book called *Sedona Sacred Earth*, (1989) which details much of the history of the landscape. He studied its ley lines, power centers and vortices, native populations, mythologies, water courses, flora and fauna. Tracing out a series of sacred patterns among the rock formations which he called geometric landscape temples, he described many individual formations as representing guardians, telling the stories that were associated with them. In the book he drew a parallel with Glastonbury, England. I have felt that connection myself, having visited Glastonbury on four occasions.

Publicity Triggers interest in the Vortex Sites

I'm told that channels and mediums of Sedona's early days were aware of the vortex energy but did not publicize it. It wasn't until **Dick Sutphen's** 1978 book *Past Lives, Future Loves* that knowledge of Sedona's unique energy became widespread. In it he described an experience with the vortex on Airport Mesa. As a result, he says, "people began writing me from all over the country asking how to find the vortex...The idea of a vortex that could enhance psychic ability had a life of its own. Interest exploded."

In the book, Sutphen wrote, *"For many years Arizona has been the rapidly developing psychic center of the country and now far exceeds Virginia Beach in the number of organizations and activities. This psychic concentration is within a one-hundred-mile circle that includes Phoenix, Scottsdale, Sedona and Prescott. ..."* Speaking of Sedona, he said, *"there is more psychic activity per capita here than in any city in the country..."*



Airport Vortex (in the saddle of the rocks)

Sutphen wrote a more complete account of his experiences in *Sedona: Psychic Energy Vortexes (1993)*. [There is local disagreement on the correct spelling of this word. When not quoting someone else I use vortexes.] He began by quoting biologist Lyall Watson, in *The Romeo Error*:

"Navigation is bedeviled by the fact that the earth's magnetic field is riddled with local deviations and irregularities. These faults have been very carefully plotted and the most persistent of them have become quite notorious. One of these lies off the Bahamas Islands (the Bermuda Triangle), another in the English county of Sussex, and a third near Prescott in Arizona."

Subsequent research led Sutphen to believe that the last mentioned area was Sedona. Supporting his conclusion is a quote from **Heather Hughes** article "Religion of the Red Mountains" which was published in Sedona Life magazine. She wrote:

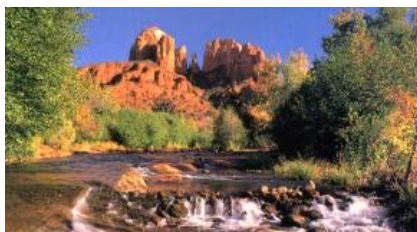
Indian legend tells us that there are four places in the world designated as "power spots" and that these four are broken into two plus two—two positive and two negative, or two "light" and two "dark." It is believed that the two positive places in the world are Kauai, an island in Hawaii and Sedona, both red-rock country. Sedona and Kauai, the Indians say, are vortexes of energy in which the Great Spirit gives birth to rainbows.

Indians tell us that the towering crimson peaks stimulate sensitivity and that here a man realizes his true dreams and ambitions. They also say that the mountains are like a great magnet and that people are drawn to them because it is the home of the Great Spirit. Amid red-rock country, it is said that man comes face to face with himself and the potentials of his nature.

Sutphen's visits to Sedona began in the late sixties and have continued to the present day. He and his wife conduct Psychic Seminars in Sedona every year.



Bell Rock



Cathedral Rock (with vortex next to it on the creek)

Page Bryant, an internationally recognized psychic, author and lecturer, also publicized the vortexes. She lived in Sedona for ten years before her move to North Carolina in 1990. Page spoke about planetary changes, sacred sites, ancient wisdom and general metaphysics. She was the first in the United States to host a purely psychic/New Age talk show.

Dick Sutphen's books and those of Page Bryant triggered a lot of interest according to **Christopher Jelm**, founder of the original *Center for the New Age* in Sedona. He says the explosion of people coming to live in Sedona started in the mid-to late 70's.

Pete Sanders, who came to Sedona around the same time as Page, also publicized the vortexes in his *Scientific Vortex Information* materials. An honors graduate of M.I.T., Pete offered a scientist's view of the local energies.

There are many books and pamphlets available locally regarding the vortex energies. The best known vortex sites are **Bell Rock**, **Boynton Canyon**, **Red Rock Crossing (Cathedral Rock)** and **Airport Mesa**. Local author, **Richard Dannelley** has published two popular books about them: *Sedona: Beyond the Vortex* and *Sedona Power Spot: Vortex and Medicine Wheel Guide*.

Another publication, *The Sedona Vortex Guide Book* contains channeled material from **Lyssa Royal**, **Robert Shapiro**, **Lorraine Darn** and **Jananda** as well as **Page Bryant**, all of whom have lived in Sedona or still do.

A New Age Pioneer

Mary Lou Keller, of Keller Realty, moved to Sedona in March 1957 and immediately felt that she had found her true home. It was she who launched most of the early New Age activities in Sedona.

Mary Lou lived in a large house located where the Hillside shops are now on Highway 179. It was called the Keller



building. Her living room held about 60 people. Mary Lou feels the current wave of New Age activities in Sedona may have begun with her interest in Manly Hall's tapes. Manly Hall was the author of an extraordinary reference book called [The Secret Teachings of All Ages](#), as well as other books on metaphysical subjects. Mary Lou put out word that a weekly tape by Manly Hall would be played at her home. Fifteen to 20 people came each week to listen.

Travelers would arrive in Sedona (as they do now) and tell her they didn't know why they were there. "The car just turned in" they would say to explain their presence. Mary Lou kept a list of local New Age-oriented people and put dots in different colors by their names, showing their particular interests. When visitors arrived with information to share, she would start calling the appropriate locals on her list to a meeting at the Keller building. Many came. A steady stream of travelers arrived in Sedona over the years, metaphysicians, psychics, astrologers, mediums and healers. Mary Lou says she felt like a magnet.

She was supported by her Real Estate business and never charged money or took collections at these meetings.

After 22 years of marriage, she and her husband split up over her interest in metaphysics so she lived alone. Because she felt some of the people who came to her meetings were pretty weird, she would ask a friend to stay until everyone had left.

[Manly Hall](#) came to give a lecture at the *Flicker Shack*, the only movie house in town until recently. Most of the seats were filled. This was shortly before his death. Mary Lou remembers he didn't look at the audience but upward. He talked faultlessly for several hours. His thoughts were coherent and there were no hesitations. One smoothly worded sentence followed another. Mary Lou was very impressed.

Keller founded the [Sedona Church of Light](#), which met in her home. She began teaching Hatha Yoga as well. Some local people were very upset and shocked by her activities. Women would turn their backs on her and sniff, she says. She felt severely criticized and judged.

A few years after her arrival, in the early 1960's, a small group came to town. They called themselves the Ruby Focus. Headed by [Evangeline](#) and [Carmen VanPollen](#), they felt directed by St. Germaine to open a center. Mary Lou assisted them in getting located. The minister, who was a medium, used to give a little reading to everyone who came to church. After Evangeline died at 87 and her husband at age 91, the group changed their name to [Rainbow Focus](#). The church is still located in the valley below the Airport Mesa vortex. Mary Lou tells the remarkable story of the faith of this group in her article "[Echoes of the Past](#)" in the [Sedona Vortex Guide Book](#).

[Judy Fisher](#) rented the Keller Building before it was purchased as part of the Hillside complex. A sign in front said *New Age Center*. People would stop when they came up from Phoenix. Crystals were for sale in front where the realtors office used to be. Mary Lou says Judy would stay in town for a while and then leave, start a center somewhere, and come back. She was a spiritualist minister.

When Judy founded *The Church of the Living God*, there were big gatherings and meetings. Every Sunday for years the popular church was packed. A message from spirit was given to each person as part of the service. Judy finally gave up and left town because the reactions from some local people were so negative.

The longest practicing realtor in the city of Sedona, Mary Lou Keller was 83 in 1997. She is busy writing a book about her experiences with New Age activities, tentatively to be called [Echoes of Sedona Past](#). This lively senior has some fascinating stories to tell.



[Mary Lou Keller](#)

More Early Memories

In doing the research for this series, I was glad to hear from [John Paul Weber](#), author of *The New Gourmet Vegetarian* and founder of [The Healing Center of Arizona](#). I rented a sleeping bag under the dome at the Healing Center during my first week in town and remember clearly some delicious suppers cooked by John Paul. He told amazing stories about the building of the Healing Center. At night, he said, he would be given directions in his dreams regarding what was to be done the next day. John Paul has been in Sedona since 1958. He grew up here. It wasn't the New Age Mecca it is now.

"The earlier experiences I and my friends had," he says, "were all very innocent and were not concerned with money or the profit motive, but were done out of love for God, the earth and each other. I used to grow organic vegetables, before I was a teenager, and sell them door to door in what is now West Sedona. It was originally named Grasshopper Flats. My friends and I would play in the Indian ruins... The biggest events in Sedona were when the apple crop ripened, selling cider to the tourists passing through town on their way to Grand Canyon, the annual fair at the Republic Pictures sound studio, (later the King's Ransom Hotel), and when a movie company came to town and made a casting call for extras in the latest western movie."

He recalled Mary Lou Keller very well. She was the lady who "... had a non-denominational church in her house...She was known as 'The crazy real estate lady,' because she had people with turbans and saris in her church. There was a Christian center for reflection and meditation in what is now known as Back O'Beyond, which had a poem by Tagore over the entrance to the meditation hall. They left town for Colorado some time in the seventies."

John Paul had to leave town to attend high school. He went on to become a Green Beret in the military, and afterward attended the University of California, first as a student and then as a professor, returning to Sedona every summer from wherever he was in the world.

"In San Francisco," he writes, "I had a Healing Center for ten years. From the donations of my students in college and my Healing Center, I began building the Healing Center of Arizona in 1979 and completed it in 1988. It is constructed of mostly recycled material. The last two years of construction were supported by volunteers and donations from the people of Sedona and people passing through town..."

"In 1986, I organized the first large gathering of counterculture people (this is what they were called before New Age became popular) into a Barter Auction at the Healing Center, where healers and therapists could barter their services for tires or haircuts or whatever. Also, in 1986, I started the Healing Hotline and soon afterwards the Hotel Hotline to help people coming into town connect with healers and therapists and find accommodations."

[Joy Devlin](#) then developed the hotline project under the name [Key to Sedona](#) and launched her business in 1990. It is a free reservation and referral service for affordable lodgings, readers, healers, tours, etc. in the area. Since 1993, Joy has also published an annual [Directory of Sedona's Lightworkers](#).

One of the highlights of John Paul's memories was the morning of [Harmonic Convergence](#), in August 1987. He sang for his friends Arend and Enoch at their wedding on Bell Rock. Thousands of people had gathered at the rock, waiting for it to open and reveal a spaceship. When the spaceship failed to materialize, they joined the wedding party and John Paul's singing. Many of them sang along with him.

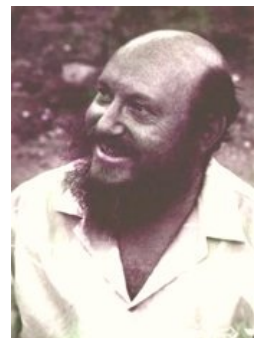
John Paul participated in the *Live Wire Choir*, a [New Age singing group](#) begun by [Larry](#) and [Sandy Reid](#) in 1986, which lasted three years. He was also a member of the *Vortex players*, a comedy troupe begun in 1987 by [Tony Sillis](#) and [Tony Carito](#), to spoof the New Age movement. In 1988, he says, a group of healers gathered together to laugh for a solid hour, an event which was recorded and included on some albums of New Age music.

[Wallace Black Elk](#), Lakota Elder, and John Paul built the first teaching sweat lodge at the Healing Center in 1988. They wanted to help others in town learn how to do a sweat lodge with appropriate reverence and care. This Mother Church Sweat lodge lasted four years. A full moon and a new moon lodge were conducted every month during that time.

In 1990, John Paul recalls dancing through town with a singing and dancing group for the St. Patrick's Day Parade promoting Earth Day. In that same year [Oman Ken](#), [Robert Frey](#) and [John Paul](#) started a monthly drumming circle open to all for dancing and drumming, which lasted several years.

"I have participated in many festivals and gatherings," says John Paul, "and have represented the New Age community at the Chamber of Commerce, the US Forest Service meetings to determine vortex and sacred site etiquette, and at the Sedona city council..."

In 1991, the CBS television affiliate in Phoenix filmed a thirty minute special, [Spirit of](#)



[John Paul Weber](#)



Sedona, which contained segments on the Healing Center, channeling, crystals and the vortices.

A year later, John Paul reports, he and Paul Davis built the first solar electric car in Sedona and named it the 'Volsswagen.' Continuing his interest in recycling and sustainable lifestyles, he taught several seminars on 'Earthships' and is presently building the first one in Sedona, hoping to set a precedent for inexpensive construction of houses using recycled automobile tires.

The Healing Center of Arizona has sponsored or presented many New Age concerts, weddings, workshops, comedy shows and underwater births. The unique building on a hillside is set among lovely gardens. When a healer passes on, a tree or rosebush is planted and a brass plaque set out with their name on it for remembrance.



Healing Center of Arizona



[Enocha Ryan](#)

Another healer, **Enocha Ryan**, runs a private sanctuary known as **Ranjita's Rest** in Oak Creek Canyon. Highway 89A runs through the canyon, from Sedona to Flagstaff, a beautiful winding drive along the tumbling creek with towering rock formations on either side.

Known today as a healer, teacher and priestess, Enocha settled in Sedona in 1974. She had been living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and after a spiritual awakening, received inner guidance to leave everything behind and begin a vision quest journey. Not knowing where to go, she and her sister, Christine, traveled around the United States together for about a year. Enocha describes their experiences as a long spiritual odyssey. When she finally saw the red rocks, she burst into tears, saying, "I found my home!"

Only 2500 people lived in the Sedona area at that time, including the Village of Oak Creek where Enocha first stayed. The VOC is actually a twenty minute drive from Sedona proper along Highway 179 but the post office treats it as part of Sedona. A gas station, a restaurant and the Bell Rock Inn provided the only amenities when Enocha arrived. There wasn't even a store for the village.

Enocha found a small metaphysically oriented group. They gathered during the 1970's and early 1980's at **Paula's Gold Dust Cafe** located next to what is now the Bookworm in uptown Sedona. Paula was known for her home cooking and especially her herb bread. "She was like a spiritual mother to all of us, unconditionally loving and accepting," says Enocha. Locals would sit and talk about dreams, guidance, channeling, other metaphysical phenomena and UFO experiences.

Paula was in a relationship with **Nick Duncan** who owned the Red Rock Crossing area including Cathedral Rock. His former wife, **Lois Kellogg**, of the famous Kellogg family, had started the **Aurobindo Center** there years before. **Sri Aurobindo** was known as one of the great spiritual masters of India. When Lois died, Nick carried on in a low key manner for a while. Eventually the land was sold to the Forest Service. Enocha remembers that you could go there to meditate or to use the library. It was a quiet special place.

Nick and Paula were the spiritual mom and pop of the region. They married in Sedona and moved to Kanab, Utah in the mid-1980's. Enocha's sister, **Christine**, also came to live in Sedona. She was in a relationship with **Glen Newell** who had the first crystal and metaphysical bookshop in the area. It was called **The House of Light**, and was located across from what is now Tlaquepaque. He did a lot of trade with Native Americans. Enocha describes him as a wise, older gentleman, rather like a sage. The couple used to be caretakers of the Cathedral Rock area when it was owned by Nick.

Uptown Sedona, a small western town in the 1970's, had only a few gift shops and hotel rooms for people on their way to Grand Canyon. The little house still standing next to Arroyo Roble, was one of the homes Enocha lived in. At that time it stood on the outskirts of town. Nothing had been built in the valley below.

There was a cooperative called **Sedona Gardens**, a restaurant, craft shops and a garden in uptown around 1979-1980. Uptown was the area most oriented to tourists. The road went on from there to Flagstaff through Oak Creek Canyon. West Sedona lay approximately two miles in the other direction and gradually developed shopping and facilities for local residents.

Enocha remembers a woman who was known as Dori. She called herself a name like Wigmilady-which had something to do with leprechauns. She lived in Rancho Sedona trailer park off of Schnebly Hill Road and was considered very spiritual, a woman who emanated love, beauty and light. Dori loved to cook natural foods. Every Wednesday night she invited people to her trailer and served them wonderful healthy food with lots of wine. It was her gift to what she considered to be her spiritual family.



Red Rock Crossing with Cathedral Rock in the background



To Flagstaff through Oak Creek Canyon

Ani Williams, who has since become an internationally known musician/healer, played her guitar at these gatherings. Ani has made numerous recordings with **Earth Song Productions** since then.

The population of Sedona was divided into two main groups as Enocha remembers it. One was the young, service-oriented types. The other was the retirees. There was nothing in the middle. It was hard to earn a living in Sedona then as now and people had to be willing to do almost any kind of work, or be very creative in order to scrape by.

The road through West Sedona was just two lanes wide. (It is now four lanes with a turning lane in the middle.) There was one grocery store. **Flicker Shack**, the movie house opened in 1975. A Bayless Market, later a Yellow Front store and a drug store completed the shopping center. Sedona Market, owned by **Bruce Connolly**, and still located in the "Y" where 89A and 179 meet, was the first place in town to carry organic fruits and vegetables and then health foods.

There was a little restaurant in uptown called The Herbmater when Enocha first came, which had a health-oriented cuisine. Sedona Gardens co-op carried health food for a few years after Herbmater closed. Then Enocha opened up a Health Food Bar called **Alive and Well** in Sedona which featured Enocha's Enovations, grainburgers which became a famous item locally. The demand for the burgers led Enocha to sell them commercially throughout the region.

Beverly Howland started Beverly's market, a fruit stand where Tamale Mama's is now. She took over making Enocha's Enovations until **New Frontiers** bought her place and Enocha's recipe for grainburgers went with it.

Enocha met **Lhesli Dove** around 1987. She attended the first goddess group that Lhesli led, exploring and celebrating the goddess energy. Today the two priestesses lead Rites of Passage ceremonies for young women.

By January 1987, Enocha felt she was ready for a mate and made a statement of this to spirit. She was guided to imagine herself as a giant magnet attracting her soulmate. Meanwhile, **Arend Versteeg**, living in San Francisco, had made a similar statement to his own spirit and been guided to imagine a Rainbow Bridge of telepathic link-up to his future mate. Arend was a transpersonal psychotherapist, a channel and a psychic healer who had never heard of Sedona. However, he was actually guided to Enocha's doorstep. Within six months they were planning a wedding.

In a channeled message, Arend was asked if he and Enocha would be willing to be married on **Harmonic Convergence** day in August, 1987, as a symbol of the integration of male and female energy. They agreed. Enocha says she always wanted to be married at sunrise on Bell Rock.

Approximately 250 people were invited to the wedding.

A large group of people gathered for the [Harmonic convergence](#) celebrations in Sedona. Over the months before the events, word had spread like wildfire around the world. This was a special date to be honored. All over the United States and in other countries people gathered in groups to meditate, celebrate and pray for the Earth.

Most of Sedona's gatherings took place in other locations. But a rumor started that the top of Bell Rock would open and a space ship would come out. It is said that some one even sold tickets to this predicted event! In any case, a large group (5000 says John Paul, 2000 says Enocha) turned up at Bell Rock to see the space ship. When it didn't appear, they made a large, reverent circle around the wedding. Enocha recalls it as the most perfect day of her life.

For ten years, she and her husband ran a healing center in the village of Oak Creek called [Emergence Center for Transformation](#). They offered many kinds of healing and shamanic work including rebirthing and channeling, held classes and led groups.

In the early years [Enocha](#) had had many wonderful experiences that demonstrated the reality of other dimensions. She became accustomed to having blissful experiences out of her body. Eventually her spirit told her "You have these points of reference. Now it is time to come fully into your body--all the way--and live from there." At first she felt closed off from the non-physical realms, as though she were being punished. Gradually she understood she had to bring all of herself into the present moment and not try to ascend out of her body. The challenge was to live fully in physical life and bring spiritual qualities into the Earth plane. Like others of the early group, she pulled back from New Age community activities, focusing more on her own spiritual development. She became interested in [Gangaji's](#) work through Ramana Maharishi's teaching and continues today to hold Sunday morning satsang in her home using Gangaji's video.

Enocha says [Robert Adams](#), a disciple of Ramana Maharishi, was in Sedona for approximately a year and a half before his death in early 1997 and people were coming from across the world to attend satsang with him. It was held twice weekly.

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