

Bench Markings

The Alcyon Center
Annual Report 2020-2021

For anyone who wishes to hear what is true and real, every voice must for once be still. Silence, however, is not merely the absence of speech. It is not something negative; it is 'something' in itself. It is a depth, a fullness, a peaceful flow of hidden life.

Everything true and great grows in silence. Without silence we fall short of reality and cannot plumb the depths of being.

– from *God is With Us* by Ladislaus Boros

Dearest Friends,

*As we write to tell you a little of Alcyon unfolding over the past year, we imagine each one of you—companions, donors, guests, friends—and the way you are present to us here at the cove. Goodness, who would we be without you? The annual report is for **slow reading** and in it you'll taste of Silence, Beauty, Beginnings, Mapping, Evolving, Angels, and the Human Spirit.*

Winter 2020-21 gave us time to take stock of what had accumulated since we moved in, summer 2008. We sorted, organized, tossed and burned box after box of old archives. Embarking on a new round of listening and waiting—we decided to begin writing.

*Here is Joan's opening chapter of a book by Joan, Kathryn and Piers Kaniuka about the roots of the teaching we've been doing together since 2009. In *Beginnings* Joan tells the *Prelude*, in the fall of 2006, that set the stage for Alcyon Becoming.*

BEGINNINGS

Four bowls of dried corn set amidst Blackberry brambles, Hawkweed, Broadleaf Aster, Apple tree suckers, Grouse drumming ground, Bracken, White Spruce roots, Balsam Fir, White Birch, two towering Ash trees, and a collage of Red and Striped Maple mark one of the earliest signs that Alcyon is coming closer as a place. The bowls and their native neighbors lie on a hillside between two streams that run into the tidal basin at the terminus of Seal Cove on Mount Desert Island. A Shaman fills the bowls with corn and places them at four corners of stepped-off space to inquire of these natural residents whether they grant an invitation to build a house for Silence where they live. After a full cycle of light and darkness when they undoubtedly confer with each other, the invitation is given. We are grateful.

Two years later we move into that house amidst the same brambles, Hawkweed, Broadleaf Aster, Spruce, Fir, Birch, Ash, and Maple trees that invite our presence. There are fewer Spruce and Fir and Bracken and



Summer at Seal Cove, watercolor by John Baird. Used with permission.

brambles but their descendants remain. Grouse still wander the hill. We understand that we are the guests here. Along the edges of this house-clearing under years of shaded blow-downs, forest duff, lichen and mosses, we find rock piles from human hands before us. We are not the only guests to live on this hillside. We are part of a very large life that hears an invitation to mark this place with something both human and holy. This is the story of one chapter in that larger life.

Kathryn and Joan take up living in this house. Our ordination vows come with us. So do our families on occasion, our pet, our friendships, our willfulness and our obedience to the Christ. We don't make a lot of noise. Something is trying to come through us into being. We offer retreat, study, training, conversation, listening, hiking, meditation, kayaking, gardening, outside speakers, and Silence – most all of them contemplative in nature. It feels like a first wash, a thing of beauty in itself, yet but an underlying necessary layer of preparation for what is coming. We keep listening. We wait.

Contemplative research,

Praise for these important Alcyon puzzle pieces: Donors, Guests, Volunteers & Board Members!

Donors May 2020 – May 2021

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and Deirdre Roche*
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* current Alcyon board members

‡ Alcyon Companions Initiative

Did we miss you? Let us know so we can find the glitch! Thank you.



Guests & Students

Bold pilgrims, one and all, we love you!

Volunteers

Fall 2020: Tesla Bartone, Molly Blansfield, Kendra Gaarder, Ben Grant, Jaclyn Greer, Miguel Meza, Coleen Mulrey, Sarah Traub

Spring 2021: Tesla Bartone, Molly Breen, Michelle DeCoste, Alicia Dwyer, Candice Rae Eatherton, Kendra Gaarder, Samantha Genest, Courtney Gonynor, Peter Martin, Cosmo Madaffari, Jasmine Mercier, Caitlin O'Rourke, Lindsay Plantier, Lexi Scott, Kara Shamsi

Spring 2020 Guest Stewards: Haela Booth-Howe & Liz Leuthner

Board Members

Current board and former board members help in the office, in the kitchen, gardens, laundry room, feed PT and offer counsel & prayer.

recovery and repair

"All maps are wrong: maps are only as good as the terrain allows them to be. They are only good for the meantime. What happens, then, when our maps no longer have any affinity with the terrain they assumedly represent? What happens when the edges come to the middle where we live? When what was once true no longer feels so? When the furniture in the hallway is no longer recognizable? How do we respond to the ground when it no longer endorses us? What do you do when you are well and truly lost?" – Bayo Akomolafe is an author, speaker, and 'walkout' academic, globally recognized for his poetic, unconventional, counterintuitive take on global crisis, civic action and social change.

MAPPING THESE TIMES

Whether we name it or not, we're all participating in cultural research simply by living in the desecrated public sphere of our times. Old maps, systems and language are barely holding. Mired in noise, we *fall short of reality and cannot plumb the depths of being*. In the confusion, we remember Silence, who befriends and calms us so we can ask:

- What is Really Real?
- How to understand what's happening below the surfaces?
- What inner capacities are needed to do this work?

Attempting to meet these questions in 2020, we worked on an Alcyon "study guide for times of spiritual crisis". Being *well and truly lost* we sifted through our backpacks – and leaned into these contemplative perspectives to illumine our path:

- Inner work, with its beauty and pain, must be tied to our outer work if we are to have the strength and vision to renew and rebuild our corner of culture and community.
- With Jung, we see that *the spirit of the depths* (all that's hidden, rejected, refused) must inform *the spirit of the times* (current worldviews, institutions, leadership) or we will be wandering and soulsick.
- Grounding in the Christ mystery reconstellates what it means to be born and to die, to forgive, to love one's neighbors and welcome the stranger.

How are you mapping these times? How are you meeting the pressures exerted on the world now? Where are you finding the whisper of freedom? To be free means to have an inner compass, an inner authority against which we measure outer authorities and pronouncements about what is true and real. To what will we agree? Where is your portal into the depths?

EVOLVING

In the Mapping Culture with Soul Cornerstone Course we practice standing between heaven and earth. We look at our lives, the world and history and ask what it means to 'step up' and include the cosmic point of view in everything we do and think. Then we ask what it means to 'step down' and include the practical earthly point of view and implications in all our actions. Here we are doing this practice with an ancient American ear of corn.



The story

The grain

The meal

The pudding

ANGELS



Ann Johnston Bob Theriault Ann Barry

We remember three of our early companions who died this year. Ann Johnston (BTS professor) and Ann Barry (spiritual guide) were guests the night we opened in June 2008. Both were part of the early years of the Northeast Guild and carried the contemplative spirit with zest and love. Bob Theriault, brought music to our contemplative worship nights, supplied us with beautifully cut and boxed kindling, apple crates, tea cubbies and wood boxes!

We give thanks for their lives and their continuing presence among us.

The Alcyon Center

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Kathryn E. Booth, Director Joan Jordan Grant, Director Grey Burkart, Office Manager

O HUMAN SPIRIT!

Come no closer! Put off your sandals for the place on which you are standing on is Holy Ground. – Exodus 3:5

In the stunning randomness of on-line algorithms, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in D-minor was offered up the other day as I sought something peaceful and classical to listen to while writing. The early bars of quiet wandering stillness enter the room... "the very essence of sound emerging from silence". Not knowing the music well, I crank up the volume to hear better just before the full orchestra enters at startling volume—and blows me backwards. An irrefusable rising up in my chest, a pouring out of something rich, desperate, sorrowing. *Where are you coming from?*

Gentle rain, gray skies and the yellow forsythia out the window...and from within tears. They deepen into that rarely visited oft-hidden corner of what must be soul. A strange seeing begins. This composer, this Human Being, felt and saw and made audible something that had never been heard before. Germinating for thirty years since he first read Schiller's Ode to Joy—Beethoven worked alone, in silence and obsessively for two years until on May 7, 1824 this 'divine architect' revealed a work to the world that still thunders and disturbs and awakens and exalts.

As the music tumbles over me, a feeling forms in a cavity in my heart. Words burst unbidden from my lips: **O Human Spirit!** I can barely hold their grandeur when equally powerfully I feel the splitting, splintering, diminishing, dividing powers and

principalities of the twenty-first century that would render lifeless this kind of Ode to Joy.

In the two hundred years since Beethoven's 'tender kiss' to humanity, we've galloped into brilliant advances in scientific and technical matters. And with that we've also seen, in Rudolf Steiner's words, "an increasing disinclination to perceive the spirit in the outer world". We barely register that we are thus 'disinclined'. Then a crisis pushes us to the edge and we begin to look below the surface of things again.

In Alcyon's contemplative research and conversations we seek to incline ourselves to spirit and soul. We discover that they live in depths and shadows, hidden and unknown. We seek to understand the forces that de-sacralize our world. Again, in Steiner's prescient words from the time of World War I:

For however deeply things may be hidden—behind the infinitely sad events of the present times lies the struggle of materialism against the spiritual world view.

– Steiner, early 20th century

O Human Spirit! What Ode will we write to you today? To which task will we devote two years? What heartfelt conversations will we have with each other? How will we prepare the ground to be Holy again? All this, and more we hold in the fullness of Silence.



The cabin alive!



Silence & Heart, June 2020



PT stalking Chippie



On the Bridge, Spring 2021

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS Books from courses & guests

The Art of Loading Brush—New Agrarian Writings by Wendell Berry

Noise by Kahneman, Sibony & Sunstein

My Grandmother's Hands by Resmaa Menakem

All We Can Save ed. by Johnson & Wilkinson

Begin Again by Eddie Glaude

The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism by Naomi Klein

Caring for Souls in a Neo Liberal Age by Bruce Rogers-Vaughn

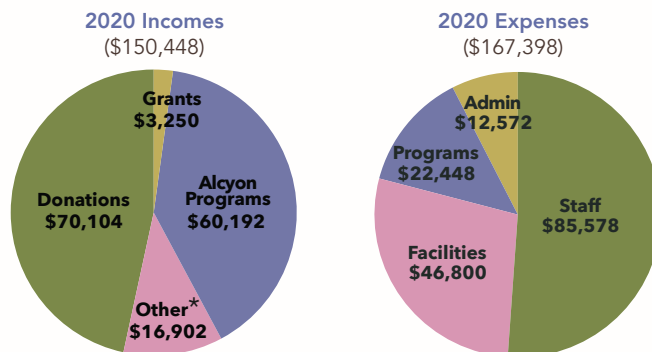
The Wild Edge of Sorrow by Francis Weller

On Heroin: America, Capitalism and the Search for Meaning by Brian Francis Culkin

Recovering: From Brokenness and Addiction to Blessedness and Community by Aaron White

Trauma and the Soul by Donald Kalsched

Facing our world's collective dis-ease in 2020 offered us all a new challenge. We chose to address the fears that breed pandemic storms with sacred silence and stillness. In live communion, body and soul with others, through 10 small resident training programs we continued forming and creating a Center that can hold.



* We were grateful recipients of a 2020 Payroll Protection Program amount of \$16,000