

# Bench Markings

## The Alcyon Center

Annual Musings & Gratitude 2022-2023

Devotion to a Quest

*The mountains of Mount Desert Island rise above the sea and fog — from a June BHB-BOS “Angel Flight”—photo by Liz Leuthner*

Dear Friends,

Fifteen years! We write you in celebration with our annual appeal and voices from the Alcyon community. Among you are hundreds of students and guests; volunteers; new and decades-long donors; treasured friends, family, and colleagues holding us close. A new blooming is afoot—come and see!

Alcyon is in a remarkable position for a nonprofit, we generate half of our income through programming. We offer scholarships to all who ask, nearly half our guests. The rest of our income is from people like you, who perceive what happens here and ask “How can I help?”—we cherish each response.

With love from us all, Kathryn and Joan and the Board: Liz Leuthner, John MacDuffie, Wanda Stahl, Donna Yellen

### Fifteen years — still being woven

If we had a bird’s eye view we’d see that Alcyon is a tapestry, a quiet and constant becoming. Whether you come to study or to rest, you bring to the weaving all the threads of your inner longings, questions, and prayer. Day by day, night by night, they are folded into the work-in-progress. Most of the time we notice just the tapestry, its magnificent jumble of conversations, dreams, long stretches of silence, meals, and hard work.

Having turned fifteen we see more clearly what holds this place together, no matter who’s in charge or what the program is. As we look to the future, we ask: What allows the conversations here to go so deep? What makes ‘it’ happen? An invisible and strong frame and pattern hold the Alcyon tapestry.

The frame at Alcyon is the land, the cove, the paths, the heavens above. Held daily by her changing embrace we must meet her daily needs. Volunteers each spring and fall criss-cross the land with rakes, clippers, hoes, wheelbarrows full of wood chips. Few escape a visit without some Benedictine Labor!

A frame alone is not yet a weaving. Embedded in daily life here are patterns and rhythms that carry us where we couldn’t go on our own. The key is certain practices done faithfully. At heart, Alcyon is devoted to Silence. Sacred Text. Study. Without these cornerstones, fear claims us. With them, the darkness is shattered and we face the world with soul, ready to love.

—Kathryn Booth, Alcyon Co-Director

### Nimbleness and devotion

The Alcyon Center assumed a place in my heart well before I arrived here, when Piers showed me a pixelated computer image of the Cove. “You’ll go there someday,” was all he said. That fuzzy image of water and rocks dislodged something long stuck in some internal silt, wiped it off, shined it up, and moved it into

my heart. I think it was love. And when at last I arrived, I could *feel* love wrapped in the Silence. In the nearly 13 years since, as a student, teacher, guest, and Board member, I have witnessed others undertake deep work that moves something in them, and walk into the loving embrace of Silence.

What is really going on here? There is an ineffable quality to the “Alcyon experience”. How to describe in common words the uncommon condition of being welcomed utterly and held unconditionally? Silence steadies us and prepares us to live with a nimbleness born of practice and devotion. Alcyon and her people, her rocks, her water – the tenders of the Silence – invite us and indeed *require* us to dislodge something from the internal silt and make a space for the beauty and the sorrow of the future. We’ll go there someday – we must.

—Liz Leuthner, Alcyon Board President and faculty

*There is a secret place. A radiant sanctuary. As real as your own kitchen. More real than that. Constructed of the purest elements. Overflowing with ten thousand beautiful things. Worlds within worlds. Forests, rivers, fountains bubbling beneath a canopy of stars. Bountiful forests, universal libraries. A clarity so complete you will never again forget. This magnificent refuge is inside you. Enter. Shatter the darkness that shrouds the doorway. Believe the incredible truth that the Beloved has chosen for a dwelling place the core of your own being because that is the single most beautiful place in all of creation.*

—St. Teresa of Avila, adapted from *The Interior Castle*

## Devotion to a quest

Last year we asked, "What if we all became *contemplative cultural researchers* seeking to repair the breaches in our communities?" Exactly what do we mean? What's different about a contemplative approach to the world's sorrow? Here are excerpts from the first edition of the *Alcyon Folio Series* in 2019 – we lean into them as we prepare a new *Folio* for 2024.

*Why contemplative? We undertake contemplative cultural research and repair because our world and institutions are crying out for radically expanded understandings of what it means to be together—human beings on earth. Behind the sleek, fast, cynical ways of our times there is a hunger lurking, haunting lives and hearts. The contemplative aims to live right at the heart of that hunger.*

*At Alcyon we are formed in the contemplative traditions of soul work that gave humanity ancient mystery schools, the Hebrew prophets and early Christian monks and mystics. Spiritual science and deep soul work open these worlds to modern souls.*

*Soul work is lonely work, so we do it together. To begin, contemplatives turn toward the vastness of silence and often find themselves walking on the margins of their culture. The Folio Series finds and features some of those voices of the souls who empty themselves of cultural assumptions and ask, and attempt to answer, questions like these:*

- *Who and what is missing from our mainstream cultural conversations?*
- *What prophetic voices are naming the swirling forces at work?*
- *Where is heart-thinking happening?*
- *What needs to die for transformation to begin?*
- *In the face of all this, how then shall we live?*

## Showing us the way



Moss kingdom under the spruce

Cinnamon-tufted elegance swam in the gloaming, 30 of them in identical copper-colored vee's out the neck of the cove into golden haze at the western edge of light. Low mewing to each other in their exodus, otherwise silence, even from the Kingfisher who watched them go, a Merganser Moment.

Words from John's Gospel followed in their wake: 'And

the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. And we could see her glory.' If Word could swim, she would be a female Merganser. We would be silent watching her. Only when she passed from our sight would we be filled with the power of her glory, enough to speak as eyewitnesses of her presence.

This fall at Alcyon we are eye-witnessing elegance, low mewing, exodus, silence, and glory. We have come to see that Word lives here in the wash basins of everyday life and in the unendurable beauty of every soul who crosses our threshold. We see her in conversations of beseeching, seeking, and knocking at the door of mystery that comes from the cove. We see her in the leaving behind of what we have been for 18 years. We see her in a new embrace of silence that calls us to trust that glory does not go out once she is seen.

The Mergansers show us the way. The Kingfisher listens to their mewing. Elegance requires a shedding of choices, a pruning of urgency for the sake of vitality. Mewing requires agreeableness, an act of will to forego preference for grateful acceptance. Exodus requires surrender of what is known for what is next. Silence requires the clearing out of all wax, the ultimate cleanse of resistance. Glory requires the Merganser Moment be given life. As eyewitnesses, the breath is ours to give for a golden swim. May it be so.

—Joan Jordan Grant, Alcyon Co-Director

## Nudged by angels



Watercolor of the cove by Terry Mason

Rooted on Seal Cove and intimately linked to the rhythms of tide and season, Alcyon is a place of refuge and learning for those who seeking a "center that can hold" through these tumultuous times. At the same time it is also a place that draws us into the future, to new ways of being with Earth, one another, and the spiritual world. And while Alcyon is adjacent to several cultural currents — namely anthroposophy, the

Judeo-Christian contemplative tradition, the world of recovery, and depth psychology - it is not merely an eclectic spiritual mélange. It is *sui generis* in a most mysterious way.

Over these last few years we have realized that we are being continually nudged and prompted by our "angel" – that being (or beings) that guides and protects Alcyon. In that spirit, we are happy to announce that we will be offering a new certificate program in 2024 called "Depth Recovery". It will be led by myself and Corey Gamberg and will bring recovery into dialogue with the dimension of depth via study and

Spring and Fall work weekends, moving bridges, stacking wood, cleaning, raking, joy abounds! Thank you team, you are the foundation for the year.



contemplative practice. Special attention will be given to the work of Robert Sardello, C.G. Jung, and James Hillman. We look forward to joining you in this work!

—Piers Kaniuka

*I have been core faculty at Alcyon since 2009. Much of my work has involved the interface of Alcyon and the recovery community.*

## Unveiling hearts

Alcyon program retreats transform lives. Many will note the special setting of Seal Cove or the felt sense of thousands of prayers abiding there. Careful preparation of the grounds, living spaces, meals, and activities all underscore that. But my experience of Alcyon Retreats is how marked they are by an unexpected and extraordinary diversity among the participants. It's a self-selecting group, after all, and yet there is intention to gather people from varied backgrounds and diverse life experience. We nearly all arrive with longing but guarded hearts. And the work of the retreat is a process of releasing that guard, learning to listen and to trust, so that the heart (your own and others) can be revealed, explored, and given room to grow. That, too, is the result of careful preparation and long experience with silence and presence. You will be honored here... and changed.

—Lael Sorensen

*I am an Episcopal priest and have been a participant at Alcyon in the Contemplative Spiritual Direction program and its Cornerstones Courses.*



*Baptism joy in the cove*

*I know that a new and kinder day will come. I would so much like to live on, if only to express all the love I carry within me. And there is only one way of preparing the new age, by living it even now in our hearts.*

—An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Ety Hillesum, 1941-43

*Dutch mystic of the Holocaust (1914-1943), in 1943 Ety and her family were placed on a transport train to Poland. From the train window she tossed out a card that read, "We have left the camp singing."*



*October work weekend flowers by K. Gaarder*

## How then shall we live?

Through the scaffolding of a meaningful, holistic, practical, moral and loving belief system, one sustains and thrives through life's ups and downs.

This list, from Before Breaking Ground, the two-part 2023 biodynamic workshop, offers glimmers of light on the path.

What's on your list?



*Moses under the stars, Icon by Ann Bradford*

### Keeping it simple—

Less is more  
 Silence is golden  
 Rhythm creates strength  
 Mindfulness is the path, loving attention the gate  
 Everything evolves, even God and good times  
 Life is the School, the Earth is the curriculum  
 Loving thoughts advance all beings  
 What goes around, comes around  
 Nature doesn't make mistakes  
 First ask, Is it good for the soil?  
 We are all related

### A few more—

Never waste a good obstacle.  
 Strive to rise, in the company of the wise.  
 Freedom and love are two sides of the same thing.  
 A healthy lifestyle is a balance of cleaning the mirror and spreading the light.  
 Find the wisdom of the old and weave it into the tapestry of the Now.  
 A species is the incarnation of an archetype that exists in the spirit world.  
 Spiritual science is the redemption of modern science, not its rejection.  
 A farm is a sanctuary for the Living and the Dead.  
 If you want to study life, study rhythms.

### Riddle me this—

What is more precious than gold?  
 What is more precious than light?

—Barbara Booth

*I've been an Alcyon teacher, board member, host, sharing my journey in agriculture and education as informed by anthroposophical posts and beams.*



# Together, we are Alcyon Community — May 2022 - October 2023 — Thank you all!

## Volunteers & helpers

Work weekends: Andy Linscott, Tony Gresoi, Kara Shamsi, Ben Grant, Lydia Grant, Kelby Doyle, Georgia Peach, Rebecca Traub, Leigha Hart (who also performed the minor miracle of 40 hours of Deep Cleaning over the winter), Kendra Gaarder, MJ Penn, Sam Duddy, Chris Upton, Jamie Macmillan, Jen, Allie, Barbara, Tesla Barton, Jackson, Kerry Leavenworth, Kelsey Livermore, Connie Bunyer, Kelsey Hackett, Anella Porto.

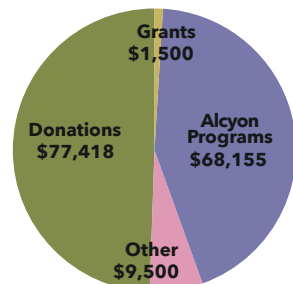
*Thank goodness for our local friends lending us hands when needed!*

## Goodbye, friends

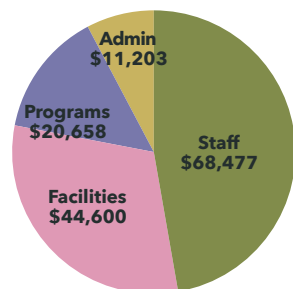
Zachary Allen     David Kessner  
Bruce Beckley     Danny Roberts  
Charlotte Dooling Paul K Jordan  
— Peace be with you —

## 2022 at a glance

2022 Incomes  
(\$156,533)



2022 Expenses  
(\$114,938)



## Donors

Jeffrey Ackerman  
Jean Alexander  
Valerie Allen  
Erika Allison  
Sharon Anderson  
*in honor of Judy Mullins*  
Anonymous  
Susan Aripotch  
Joe & Brenda Armstrong-Champ  
John & Aminda Baird  
Laurence & Roseanne Becker  
Michele Beckstrom  
Judy Belasco  
Katherine & Gregory Black  
Kevin Bliss  
Deborah Blood  
Ann Boltz  
Barbara Booth  
Joanne Booth  
Kathleen Bowman  
Valerie Brown  
Gay Bulan  
Tony & Donna Burkart, Jr.  
Carolyn Cahill  
Catherine Carter  
Connie Carter & Ed Brazee  
Patricia Chanterelle  
Melanie Clauson  
Janet & Bob Clifford  
Community Foundation of  
Tompkin's County  
Anne Cushman  
Kenneth Dale  
Nick & Mary Angela Davis  
Peggy Davis  
Patricia Donahue ‡  
Patricia Dubois  
Eric & Liz Erickson  
Sara & Allen Ewing-Merrill  
Barry Fernald & Sarah Ballingal  
Paula Flynn  
Benjamin Fox  
Dee & Dave Gautschi  
Leanne Tigert & Emily Geoghegan  
Barry Glunt

Peter & Wendy Grannell  
Gerry & Wayne Gregersen  
David Hawkes  
Sara Hayman  
Anne Heisey  
Elaine & Michael Hewes  
Annika & Andrew Hikade  
Xenia Hodza  
Brenda Hollweger  
Sandra Horne  
MaryAnn Ingalls  
Fran Irvine  
Danny Jones  
Glenn & Nancy Jordan  
Gregg Jordan  
Paul Jordan  
Ben Kapelson  
David Kessner  
Christie Knoff  
Leela Koilpillai  
William Kolodnicki  
Joel Kreuger & Kate Winters  
Lisa Kutolowski  
Ilona Kwiecien  
Raymond & Beth Lambert  
Cordelia Lane ‡  
Elizabeth Laverack  
Jane Lawless  
Timothy LeConey  
Patricia Leuthner  
Liz Leuthner \*  
Melissa & Chuck LeVine  
Richard & Sarah Lincoln-Harrison  
Ellen Lukens  
Carol & Don Lyon  
John MacDuffie \*  
Machias Savings Bank  
Maine Conference UCC  
Jason McLin & Sophia Lyons  
Pauline McNeil  
James McPhee  
Lisa Merchant  
Ute Molitor  
Neil Macmillan & Judy Mullins‡  
Kathleen Musser

Bill & Sydney Patten  
Suzanne Picurro  
Katharine Powers  
David Putnam  
Dana Reed  
Gail Reiber  
Leeann Rhoades  
Kim Ribbens  
Elizabeth Roberts  
Jean Rohrer ‡  
Susan Ryder  
Tom Schley  
*in memory of Elizabeth Trocki*  
Winifred & Chuck Shuetz  
Michelle Scott  
Polly Shyka  
Inge Smallidge ‡  
Pamela Smith ‡  
Somesville Union Meeting House  
Paul Spencer  
Scott & Catherine Springer  
John Stahl  
Karen Stahl  
Wanda Stahl \*  
Charles Stanhope  
State Street Foundation  
Susan Stonestreet  
Emily & Robert Stribling  
Frank Talbott  
Elaine Theriault  
Thomas F. Staley Foundation  
James Tomlinson  
Rebecca Traub  
Jeff Cosulich & Chris Upton  
Mary Whiting ‡  
Beth Wood Whitley  
Peter Wohl  
Richard Wile & Mary Lee Wile  
Barbara Wright  
Helen & Jim Wright‡  
Donna Yellen \*  
June Zellers

‡ Alcyon Companions  
\* Board Members

## Highlights & looking ahead

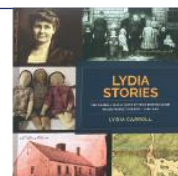
The past four years have given us all a powerful taste of what can go wrong overnight. Curiosity grounded in daily prayer gave us holy ground upon which to stand. We kept the doors open, did research, deep cleaned the whole place and pruned the library to make room for the new! Most of all we engaged in the art of arts—deep spiritually inspired conversation.

Programs continue to evolve to meet the times. Colleagues are teaching with us and rounding out and deepening what we offer. Day-long intensives, conversations-for-our-times, and quarterly volunteer work days are in the works for 2024.

*Our programs and calendar will be on [alcyoncenter.org](http://alcyoncenter.org) early next year. Sign up there for News from the Cove, our email newsletter.*

Hallelujah! The highest point of the summer was the arrival of Joan's long-gestated book. Find it at local libraries or at [www.lydia-stories.com](http://www.lydia-stories.com).

And that's a whole 'nother story!



## The Alcyon Center

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