



# guesthouse

## NEWSLETTER

Winter 2014



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## A New Executive Director for Guest House

Meet Guest House Retreat & Conference Center's new executive director, Saralyn Kerrigan! Saralyn went right to the top of the pile of very impressive resumé's the board of directors reviewed during the selection process.



Evidently she felt very positive about us from the get-go too. "When I saw the position advertised, my heart leapt," she remembers. "I had been looking, hoping, praying, intending—and everything else you could imagine—for the 'right' job

for me; a good fit, a place I could work out the rest of my career making a difference. So when I saw the ad, I thought, 'Oh, my, could this be it?'"

Providentially, her instincts turned out to be right. Saralyn brings over 20 years' experience in management and leadership to her position, much of it in the field of elder care. She comes to us with a diverse skill set that includes solid management expertise, strategic planning and implementation, sales and marketing and human resources. Guest House is thrilled to have her.

Originally from Maine, Saralyn married and raised a family in Connecticut, then moved to California where she became a certified gerontologist and worked as a manager/administrator for one retirement community and district sales and marketing director for another. She came back to Connecticut in 2010. Saralyn has a daughter and two grandchildren. She remarried this past April and lives with her husband and stepdaughter in Lisbon, CT.

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## My Guest House

*By Leah Chyten*

The place we now affectionately call Guest House was formerly an inn and a popular local tavern. I was fortunate to have been among the first group of people to participate in its evolution toward becoming a support for the realization of human potential, serving our Diamond Approach® community as well as other groups of similar intent.

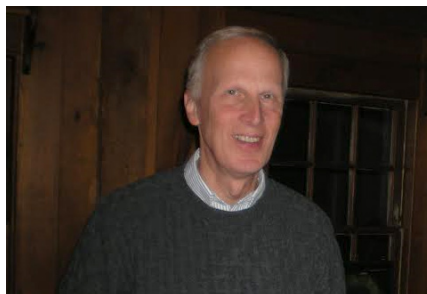
I was also part of the self-appointed "retreat center naming committee." Contemplating the task at hand, the word 'guest' immediately sprang to mind. The word honored the history of this space. But there were also deeper and richer layers of meaning to it that were revealed in the form of two poems. The first and more well known was Rumi's poem "The Guest House," in which the 13th-century mystic uses the word guest to describe the myriad of human experiences that, when treated as guests, become doorways to our inner nature.

*(Continued on page 3)*

# Guest House News

This late summer and fall have seen several staff changes at Guest House in key positions:

We say goodbye to our beloved Jim Emswiler, our sales director for many years. Jim was formerly the executive director of Mercy at Madison, a retreat center in Madison, CT. So aside from helping us build a strong base of regular guest groups, Jim also proved a vital source of practical information for our own executive directors Adam Fuller and Steve Kennedy. Jim is also the author, with his wife Mary Ann, of *Guiding Your Child Through Grief* (Bantam, 2000), a book about how he helped his children from his first marriage deal with their mother's sudden death in 1989. Jim left us late in summer to embark on a much anticipated life of travel with Mary Ann, who had recently retired. We will miss his wry sense of humor, but we are delighted that he and Mary Ann are enjoying a long-deserved rest.



At its November meeting, the board of Guest House formally celebrated the transition of our executive director Steve Kennedy into the role of sales director that Jim had vacated. Steve joined us four years ago and was responsible for turning around Guest House—improving its buildings and grounds, putting in place a highly professional staff, and growing our business. During that time he also pulled Guest House through a hurricane, two consecutive winters with record snowfalls, multiple power outages, a tornado and even an earthquake! None of these proved a match, however, for Steve's ever optimistic, can-do attitude and unbounded enthusiasm for solving problems. Through his talented oversight and management, he navigated Guest House to its first profitable year (2013). We are deeply grateful for his dedication and service, and we are thrilled that he will be staying on in another capacity. The board has come to view Steve not just as an executive director, but as a valued friend. We wish him success in his new position. We're also sure his wife Pattie will appreciate what will now be his more normal hours.



## Essential Contemplations

In each issue, we look at different views from various paths regarding a single subject. In light of all the comings and goings of new and old staff, for this issue we decided to focus our attention on the way great thinkers have contemplated the concept of change...

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*"Thanks to impermanence, everything is possible."*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

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*"When it is allowed, change can only be good, can only be expansion. The natural movement is towards greater abundance. If you are not experiencing expansion and abundance it's because you are interfering."*

—A.H. Almaas

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*"Without accepting the fact that everything changes, we cannot find perfect composure...Because we cannot accept the truth of transience, we suffer."*

—Shunryu Suzuki

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*"Let everything happen to you, beauty and terror, no feeling is final."*

—Rainer Maria Rilke

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*"They must often change, who would be constant in happiness or wisdom."*

—Confucius

# My Guest House

*(Continued from page 1)*

The relationship between the message of this poem and the nature of our work was strikingly clear. But I also found profound richness and depth in another poem, this one by A.H. Almaas, that appears in his book *Luminous Night's Journey*. The guest Almaas refers to here is synonymous with the inner Beloved, the Mystery, the Absolute, the Source, our most fundamental nature. The call from this source initiates and sustains, and ultimately fulfills, our journey of realization.

There are many retreat centers in the world and all have their particular missions. What I feel is distinct and unique about our Guest House is how seamlessly it manifests all levels of the word 'guest.'

deep sorrow, we strive for our dreams and ideals, which are tempered by circumstances we encounter. It takes a strong intention and the right kind of support to persevere, to maintain our orientation, to know that the ground is there no matter the outer conditions. I feel Guest House as a living consciousness integrally entwined with the consciousness of the Diamond Approach path and with each of us called to take this journey. We are all developing together, in synchronistic unfoldment. I sense this dynamic unfoldment every time I walk through the door of Guest House. I feel its living consciousness embracing me—holding me, but also growing with me. We have celebrated each other's maturation,



Recalling all my experiences at Guest House, both as student and teacher, my body relaxes, my heart feels personally welcomed by the warmth of place and staff, and my soul feels aligned and in contact with the powerful ground of mystery, of source. That this is my experience is not surprising. Those of us who stood on this land for the first time felt a deep channel to and from this source. What is surprising is how our initial knowing has remained constant, even with all the surface changes that this building and grounds (and we as a community) have experienced.

And yet from the perspective of our work, it makes perfect sense. The development of each soul requires a myriad of experiences to grow and mature. We expand and contract, we feel great joy and

tolerated each other's growing pains and held each other through dark winter nights and blazing summer days.

It is easy to forget. It is easy to think of Guest House as buildings in constant need of repair, as an organization with endless challenges to overcome, as a place that serves me great desserts to be indulged or resisted depending on the day. It sounds like life...or at least my life when I temporarily lose remembrance of the deeper ground. And then I remember, and in the experience of that profound love my perspective returns. Problems, inconveniences, difficulties are simply guests. ■

## A New Executive Director

*(Continued from page 1)*

It should be noted that it was not just Saralyn competing with other executive director candidates; Guest House was also vying against other possible employers. "I was interviewing with three other companies," she says. "But the more I learned about Guest House and the more board members and staff I met, I found myself saying, 'I don't want any of those jobs, I want to be part of Guest House.' I wound up with four job offers in one week, one offering a higher salary than Guest House. But by then my heart had made the choice and I knew that I would accept Guest House's offer. I didn't even haggle! I couldn't wait to get started. I am honored to be at the helm of Guest House."

Of the interview process, says Saralyn, "It was thorough and thoughtful. The questions were challenging. I knew the board was not just trying to fill a position. I imagined they wanted someone who would love Guest House as much as they do. I was so impressed by their commitment to continuing to grow Guest House as a self-sustaining, nurturing gathering place for transformational work."

Saralyn's first day on the job was November 10th and, she says, "I am already falling in love, it is such a dynamic, yet peaceful, place. When I first toured Guest House I was impressed with the homey feel, the cleanliness, and I just had a sense of peace." Welcome, Saralyn! ■



*Melissa Hall Baker*

## Guest House News

*(Continued from page 2)*

Another change of guard: Meredith Dow, our retreat services coordinator, left in August to expand her yoga teaching business. She is also filling in her time working at the Cooking Company in Killingworth.

Our new retreat services coordinator, Melissa Hall Baker, started September 30th. Most recently, Melissa held two positions: special events assistant and UCONN's Branford House in Groton, CT, and assistant manager at The Candy Box.

She has also held a number of hospitality positions at, among others, The Steamboat Inn in Mystic, a Best Western and the Quidnessett Country Club in North Kingstown, RI.

In her new position, Melissa will be responsible for helping our director of retreat services, Marianne Hile, coordinate the many elements of retreats for our many groups. She will also handle registrations for Emerald Mountain and provide customer service, both on the phone and at the front desk.

Please join us in warmly welcoming her to Guest House. ■

## From the Kitchen

Just in time for your holiday baking comes a recipe we have all savored and adored. Every time we arrive at Guest House, the aroma of Chef Steve's freshly baked oatmeal-cranberry cookies greets us in the lobby. Then we spy the platter of these delectable morsels welcoming us from the round table and we're gone. The good news is that the recipe is a cinch! So start your ovens.

### The Perfect Cookie

*Makes about 3 dozen*

1¾ cups flour  
¾ tsp. baking soda  
¾ tsp. baking powder  
½ tsp. cinnamon  
½ tsp. nutmeg  
¼ cup sugar  
1½ cup brown sugar  
2 eggs  
2 sticks butter, melted  
2½ tsps. vanilla  
3 cups oatmeal  
3 cups dried cranberries



1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees.
2. Mix dry ingredients (flour through nutmeg).
3. Beat sugars, eggs, butter and vanilla until sugars are dissolved. Then fold in dry ingredients, oatmeal and cranberries. Batter should be very dense.
4. Drop tablespoons of the cookie batter onto an ungreased baking sheet and cook about 12-15 minutes, depending on degree of doneness you desire (less for chewier cookies, more for crunchier cookies).
5. Remove to a rack and cool. ■

# Why Does Guest House Matter?

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Perhaps this question is best answered with other questions. For instance: ***If Guest House were gone, what would you lose?*** For starters, another earthly door inviting the development of human potential, welcoming transcendent truths in their many forms, would close. The powerful, transformative energy gathered here by the many groups who attend—from U.N. working groups and educational institutions to those fostering more meaningful leadership and awakening creativity—would lose a vital vessel and dissipate. We believe the world would be poorer for this loss.

***How would it affect your own process of maturation and spiritual development?*** It probably would not. The “work”(whatever that means for you) is the “work,” no matter where or how it manifests. But we also believe that the energy present, and the immersion experience this peaceful sanctuary offers, helps intensify the experience of ***everyone’s*** work. The field of holding Guest House provides, nurtures and sustains our hearts and souls, allowing us to relax into deeper layers of understanding and gives us the strength for action in the world.

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*“Put your money where your heart is. If you’ve been moved by anything here, helped by anything here, give.”*

—Anne Singer, Diamond Approach teacher

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***Is Guest House really your home?*** Every year, concepts of home arise in the evaluations of some 3,000 visitors who stay with us: they feel “safe,” “deliciously fed,” “warm,” “cared for,” “comfortable,” “held.” Because Guest House supports the Northeast Diamond Approach groups in many ways, it does feel like home to many of these students. But because the staff and board of Guest House cultivate this sense of home, many other groups have come to consider it home too. Why else would so many book for several years in a row?

Like any home, Guest House needs care and attention. There are repairs to be made, improvements to strive for, coats of fresh paint to brighten our spaces, refrigerators to be stocked and housekeepers to employ so we can continue to guarantee our high standard of cleanliness and impeccability. ***We are very short of our fundraising targets this year.*** We depend on you to keep our doors open and to safeguard that the transformative energy—more needed by humankind than ever—accumulates and grows. There are so many ways to give: an old-fashioned donation, annual membership in our Friends of Guest House program, a gift to our commemorative giving campaign (or any combination of these).

Please be generous this holiday season. Help us ensure that Guest House will keep welcoming you home again and again each year. ***Guest House really does matter.***

Please go to [www.guesthousecenter.org/give](http://www.guesthousecenter.org/give) to see how you can help.

With deep appreciation,

The Guest House Board of Directors

Happy Holidays to all our supporters.  
Thank you from Guest House!

