

Margaret Austin Center NEWS

FALL 2015

FROM HERE TO IMPERMANENCE

As I drive down the road, leaving Austin behind and heading east, I feel a sense of lightness and anticipation. The hour and a half drive is just the right amount of time for me to release my day-to-day routine of the city and head toward the winding roads from Chappell Hill to the Margaret Austin Center. It is late December, rainy and a bit nippy out, as I head out Highway 290 to begin a silent, eight-day Insight Meditation retreat.



All article photos by Francine Fowler

I have always wanted to learn to meditate, but left to my own devices, I barely manage to sit for 10 minutes without fidgeting and getting up to attend to some household distraction. So, being one who loves to dive in head first, I decided on the total immersion method. I arrive a little early, but that's how I like to start new adventures. As I enter the driveway, the sign in the yard—*UNLOADING ONLY*—seems so appropriate. I set an intention to “unload” all that is not useful in my life and start this year fresh and unfettered.

I am greeted warmly and shown to the Susan Krantz House, where I will be staying for the retreat. I unpack and organize my belongings. The retreat center's peace has already started to settle me into a space of contentedness and ease. This is a sacred place with a history of contemplative and spiritual practices. I believe a place takes on the history of its visitors; when we leave we do not take all that has transpired with us, but leave behind some essence of what we have experienced, and who we have become during this time.

Supper the first evening is simple and satisfying; soup is comforting on a chilly evening. We each select a set of dishes and utensils to be ours for the entire stay. Silence at meals and the practice of washing our own dishes, one after another, supplies a rhythm and connection among us even in our silence. There is comfort in the quiet. At first, my mind is loud and busy with thoughts. As the week progresses, my mind settles and the tastes and textures of the food become an active meditation experience.

Night falls quickly and deeply here in the meadows of the rolling countryside. A quiet walk in the dark shows off the architecture of the center's buildings and sets the mood for restful sleep.

I awake each morning refreshed and ready to greet the day, even though it's cold and rainy out. Misty mornings add to the quiet and peacefulness. I wish I could hold onto this feeling, but I am learning that everything is impermanent, and a moment can only be experienced if I am present in it. This moment will pass and another will take its place. So, I revel in it. Then I let go and set off to yoga.

Early-morning yoga and meditation sessions are held in the meditation hall, an inspiring space. It's almost impossible to shed my shoes, walk in the door, and not feel relaxed and calm. The expanse of earth and sky and the light



streaming through the large windows makes it easy for my heart to open and my mind to settle.

Breathe deeply.....In.....out..... let go of stray thoughts..... come back to my breath



*inhale.....exhale...slowly..... settle thinking
mind into stillness and releasebreathe in.....
breathe outrepeat.....*

Eight days later, I leave the Margaret Austin Center with a full heart and peaceful mind. I have set an intention to meditate, practice yoga and write. I am in deep, deep gratitude to have been honored to share this restorative space.

THE GURDJIEFF FOUNDATION— HOME AGAIN AT MARGARET AUSTIN CENTER

This Memorial Day weekend, the Gurdjieff Foundation of Texas (based in Houston) once again participated in its annual Intensive Work Period. This retreat is the culmination of a year of study and experience of the Gurdjieff tradition. We have appreciated the Margaret Austin Center’s ideal conditions for our Work since the early 1990s. Five days are spent at the Center, living and working together in the peaceful, beautiful environment. The well-appointed kitchen is the hearth of our weekend, where our kitchen team prepares food for the group. We eat most meals in the dining room off the kitchen, which has skylights and windows on three sides, looking out to the meadows. Meal time is an important part of our schedule, as we not only break bread together, but also share our experiences of the ideas we try to study on a practical level.

Perhaps the building most important for us is the Zendo, which is nestled in a bamboo grove. It has been recently renovated, including a beautiful new wood floor. Our Work days begin and end in the Zendo. Every morning and evening we participate together in our form of meditation, which we call “sittings.”

The Gurdjieff-de Hartmann music is important to our

tradition. Every May, we carefully move the upright piano from our Foundation to the Zendo. There, twice a day, music is played for the performance of the Movements, or sacred dances. Often the sound of piano music floats on the breeze as the musicians practice, not only the Movements’ music, but also the listening music—hymns, prayers, sayyids, and dance rhythms. The listening music is then shared in the evening after dinner.

Another important form of our Work is craft. Through the practice of craft, we can study attention in a quiet environment free from distraction. We often try an exercise during craft time. This year we tried an exercise in which we periodically stopped to gather ourselves for a few minutes, and then returned to our Work. One craft team participated in the dyeing and block-printing of prayer flags. Another craft team worked on a project of Celtic design woodcarving.

As well as craft work throughout the day, we also attended study groups in the late afternoon. There was a study of listening, as the primary work of G.I. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, was read aloud. Another group studied the symbolism of the sacred body in various traditions. A writing study group opened the question of writing as a spiritual pursuit.

On the last full day of our retreat, we always prepare for an evening celebration of our Work together. The Zendo is transformed into a banquet hall, as we move in the tables we brought with us and decorate them. This year the prayer flags were put up as decorations, and the Celtic carving was displayed on one of the tables. The kitchen team prepared a special meal. We toasted those who had come before us and brought us this tradition. We also expressed gratitude for our work together in this special place, which for us is a spiritual home.

The next day, we packed up to head back to Houston. We have booked the Margaret Austin Center for another year. We will come back as often as we can, for the Margaret Austin Center is our second home.

“the Gurdjieff Foundation Writing Team”

GOOD EVENING EVER SO PATIENT ONE!

I think part of my struggle with getting something to you is I don’t feel there is a story, and yet to someone other than myself, perhaps there is. So this is my contribution to your newsletter (please use this whole thing, even the ruminating portion).

(cont’d on p.5)

RETREAT SCHEDULE AT MARGARET AUSTIN CENTER

TO REGISTER FOR THESE PUBLIC RETREATS,
PLEASE USE THE CONTACT INFORMATION LISTED BELOW.

Sep. 16-20, 2015

The Yoga of You, A Silent Retreat

This is a silent yoga retreat focusing on inner stillness and conscious language skills. For more information or to register, contact Larry at lthraegn@gmail.com.

Oct. 1-4, 2015

Insight Meditation with Kate Wheeler Moving Beyond Bad Days (and Good Days)

Let's soften up our habit of judging, congratulating, and blaming. Instead, with mindful attention, we begin to see ourselves, others, and life, just as we are. Everything that happens invites us to learn to be free and awakened. This retreat will use the basic skills of mindfulness to notice whether experience is pleasant, unpleasant, or "neutral." Then we will notice the impermanence of these feelings. Why add grief and clinging? The retreat will be held in silence. For more information or to register, visit imhouston.wordpress.com.

Oct. 16-18, 2015

Yoga Yoga Women's Retreat Becoming One with Life

There is a saying, "We cannot prevent that the birds of anguish and desperation perch on the head, but we can avoid that they nest in the hair." This weekend we will focus on opening to our experiences, even the difficult ones, without letting them nest upon our heads and hearts. We will discuss how each experience we encounter in life is an opportunity to become one with life as it is, rather than as we wish it to be or as others expect it to be. Thus, even in the face of life's challenges, we can discover a sanctuary of wisdom and equanimity within our own awakened hearts. Please join us for a weekend of yoga, community and connection with each other, and with our lives as they are. For more information or to register, visit yogayoga.com.

Oct. 29-Nov. 1, 2015

Metta Retreat with Anushka Fernandopulle

Anushka Fernandopulle strives to help people reach their full potential in the world, by bringing Eastern practices to Western modern life. She combines 20 years of training in Mindfulness Meditation with an extensive

background in business, including an MBA from Yale. In 2011, Anushka joined the teacher's council at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. For more information, visit mariposasangha.org.

Nov. 13-15, 2015

YogaOne Women's Weekend

Women of all ages and walks of life are invited to come together in warmth and community to connect, revitalize and replenish. Nurturing our connection to ourselves allows us to connect more fully throughout our lives. YogaOne Women's Weekend Yoga Retreat will provide the opportunity to nourish this connection in a supportive and loving environment. Our tranquility-filled weekend will include yoga, creative exploration, meditation, connecting with like-minded women, and an abundance of deliciously prepared, organic, vegetarian meals. For more information or to register, visit yogaonehouston.com.

Dec. 4-6, 2015

Yoga & Meditation with Charles MacInerney

Join one of Austin's most respected yoga teachers for a weekend of Hatha yoga, meditation, and philosophy. Workshops will cover pranayama and the science of breath, the mind/body connection, biofeedback, creativity, and mind-mapping. All levels are welcome to attend, and participation in all activities is optional. For more information or to register, visit yogateacher.com.

Dec. 27, 2015 - Jan. 2, 2016

New Year's Insight Meditation Retreat with Shaila Catherine

This silent Insight Meditation retreat is structured with alternating periods of sitting and walking meditation, dharma talks, question and answer sessions, and teacher consultations. All levels from beginners to advanced practitioners are welcome. Shaila Catherine is the founder of Insight Meditation South Bay, a Buddhist Meditation Center in Silicon Valley, and has taught internationally since 1996. Shaila's gentle and clear teaching style blends respect for traditional Buddhist training with diverse influences from her varied teachers and experiences that include study with Advaita masters and Tibetan lamas, intensive metta practice, and sutta study. For more information, visit mariposasangha.org. Registration opens November 1.

GRATITUDE

Our mission at the Margaret Austin Center is to provide a sanctuary for the spirit... no matter what spiritual path you may be on. Our many generous donors help us to keep our prices as low as possible so that groups of all types and from widely varied backgrounds can enjoy our facilities. Thank you! (July 2014 to July 2015)

In Memory of Martha Morris
Robert & Susan Hawkins
Jim and Naomi Rosborough

In Memory of John Sieber
Judith Armogida
Todd & Diana Fredricks
Jack & Nancy Sieber

In Honor of Mike Walker
Patrick Baum

In Honor of Kathey Ferland
Marilyn Jones & Brad Morris

In Honor of Phil Buterbaugh
Kathey Ferland

In Honor of Bryan Jones
Dorsey Cartwright

Amazon
Harvey Aronson
Julian Brown & Daryl Koehn
Rebecca Carpenter
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AVAILABLE DATES FOR RETREAT BOOKING

Sep. 4-6, 2015

Sep. 11-13, 2015

Oct. 23-25, 2015

Nov. 6-8, 2015

Nov. 20-22, 2015

Dec. 11-13, 2015

Dec. 18-20, 2015

Jan. 8-10, 2016



(cont'd from p.2)

In a very ordinary sort of way I have begun to donate occasionally a peace pole here and there, as I am so moved either by the experience I have in a certain place, or by appreciation for something some group has done or is doing. In your case, I thought, what a peaceful and nourishing place; wouldn't it be nice to have a peace pole here? Pretty simple, pretty ordinary.

And yet, is it so? It would be nice to have peace be ordinary, and I pray for that time. Sadly, as I am sure you know, peace is anything but ordinary or assured. So what do we do? How do we live? Where do we find the nourishment with which to continue to work for peace in our own unique and valuable ways?

The peace pole is pretty plain; it is made from PVC material that will long outlast our civilization. Though the writing on it will vanish, the pole will last virtually forever, as we have not yet determined how long it will take this synthetic material to be digested by nature. Strange, isn't it? Kind of weird, isn't it? Perhaps there is some deep-hidden meaning there one of your clever readers will come up with. However, if the peace pole does nothing else other than bring a smile to a viewer, or cause a visitor to pause, then in its ordinariness it has served my single reason for donating it.

I will share one story that recently happened at a Christian church to which I donated a peace pole because of their wonderful, under-praised work in the community with those who find themselves resource-challenged. The night before the pole was to be planted and dedicated, someone stole it. Yep, that's right—gone, vanished, grew legs and so forth. The pastor freaked out, got ahold of me and asked, what do we do? I said, why, of course we just keep on going.

So what do you do when someone hijacks or derails your efforts as you work for peace, however you define that? What do you do? Why, hopefully you keep going!

By the way, I just ordered the church a replacement, because the pole is just a thing and things can be replaced, but people and their feelings and their spirits are not easily mended. I hope that all who come to your center find the healing and mending they need.

With Gassho (appreciation and respect)

Ryusho Jeffus, Shonin, MDiv, BCC Myosho-ji, Wonderful Voice Buddhist Temple, Charlotte, NC

P.S. Thanks again for accepting my donation and also for your incredible patience.



Teri Van Horn

“NO RACETRACK” IN WASHINGTON COUNTY CELEBRATES VICTORY

Fifty people gathered at the Margaret Austin Center on Sunday, June 14, 2015, to celebrate the success of the “No Racetrack” initiative. Since the beginning of 2015, a developer had sought to build a large private racetrack about two miles due west of the Center.

The initiative galvanized local people to voice their concerns with elected officials and the media about the racetrack, which would have disrupted the peace and quiet of the Chappell Hill area. Area residents organized a legal action to oppose the raceway, which the Center joined. We all gave thanks that the developer decided not to proceed with a car racetrack on the Mel-Acres tract. A special thanks goes to Charles Fridge and his law firm, Fridge & Resendez, for working so diligently and successfully to stop this project.

Kathey Ferland

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REMINDER: Send us an email at info@macenter.org to let us know if your address or email has changed or if you want to be removed from the mailing list.



Francine Fowler