



## Newsletter Winter 2018

### Where are We Now?

Inner Fire is now in its third year of life, and like the child at that age, is clearly in a process of shaping and defining its individuality.

Outwardly this is manifesting in the construction of the Inner Fire home. Ground has been broken, and much of the sitework has been done. Winter interrupted the process before the foundation could be poured, which is now scheduled for early spring. Most of the funds for the east wing of the building have been raised, and with a little additional help we expect the seekers to move in toward the end of summer.



The emerging personality of Inner Fire is also manifesting organizationally. Until now, Beatrice has carried much of the responsibility

on her shoulders. Currently a leadership team of five people is forming, which will carry a lot of the tasks jointly. The team includes Beatrice, Audrie Brown, Zach Holms, Michael Steinrueck and Laura Young.



The Inner Fire Board is expanding and growing too. Four new members have joined in the past year, each contributing essential areas of expertise. We plan to profile the board in the next newsletter.

Overall, we have had 17 seekers so far in the Inner Fire program. With some having recently left, there are only two seekers with us at the moment, and a few in the pipeline to join. We are limited to three until the new building is complete.

Michael Steinrueck

### Seeker?

At Inner Fire, program attendees are called "seekers". How did we come to use this term, rather than client, patient or resident?

For years, I painted with men in a local prison before moving to Vermont to launch Inner Fire. One day when I went into the prison, a fine young man told me that he had been trying to write to a friend on the outside about our painting class, and how hard he found it to describe what actually happened in the class. He told me that eventually he wrote: "Well, it is a painting class, but really, it is a spiritual class." Then he stated: "This is what I was looking for on the outside. Isn't it strange that I had to come to prison to find it?"

"You are all seekers", I realized. Certainly, he and so many other young struggling individuals are seeking for more than our materialistic life generally presents these days—they are thirsty for depth and meaning.

As life is a journey, forever unfolding and offering opportunities for inner growth, our staff are referred to as "guides". Yet I believe we are all seekers and, with what we learn, we are also guides.

Beatrice Birch

### Capital Campaign Update

**Of the \$250,000 needed to complete the east wing of the Inner Fire home, the December appeal has brought in a total of \$142,192 so far. Thank you for helping us reach our goal; every penny counts and is greatly appreciated!**

**If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to help us raise the remaining \$107,808, please mail a check to Inner Fire at 26 Parker Road, Brookline VT 05345, or visit the website at [innerfire.us](http://innerfire.us)**

## From the Director



Over the past three years of attending and presenting Inner Fire at conferences in different parts of the USA and the

United Kingdom, I have been heartened to experience how the tide has begun to turn. However, we certainly are not through the eye of the needle. The pharmaceutical forces are extremely powerful and lives are being shortened and lost. However, the typical medical model where the magic bullet is meant to “fix”, has begun to be challenged by creative ways of supporting human beings who want to be proactive in their healing process rather than medicated.

At a recent conference where I presented Inner Fire, the room was packed. People were sitting on the floor and lining the walls. By now, I am used to seeing tears in the eyes of listeners. Everyone knows

someone who has committed suicide or is walking the streets as a zombie, devoid of clear thoughts, any tangible feelings or any sense of direction. They certainly do not feel human. People are told they will have to be on these psychotropic medications for the rest of their lives. Is this all they can look forward to? The medications can be beastly to come off of...but slowly and carefully, with enough courage and determination, it is possible. Without the support they are longing for, individuals are wasting their precious lives and they know it, but the choice, an alternative to the pill, is hardly visible.

Not only at conferences, but daily during phone calls from parents I hear: “This sounds ideal!” “My child hates being medicated.” “A year program, that makes sense, it takes time!”, “I wish I could go there...!”. Tragically, at this time, the cost is prohibitive for many striving people (we do have a Support a Seeker Fund and donations are always welcome). Exhausted parents, who don’t recognize their off-

spring due to the effects of the medications, always come up to me after my presentations sharing horror stories. People give testimonies of their own tapering process from these mind altering, psychotropic medications. Recently, after describing the program and why we do what we do, a male nurse in the front row, leaned forward and declared: “You are talking about love!” Indeed, we are. We believe in the resilience of the human spirit and that though we may feel victims, in fact, we are creators. We can approach our challenges as opportunities for growth and work toward balancing our soul’s reaction to traumatic experiences through the enriching and comprehensive practical and artistic program offered at Inner Fire. I know we are on the right track when time and again people come up to me and declare how inspired, enthusiastic and full of hope they are simply knowing that a place like Inner Fire exists.

Beatrice Birch



### Introducing Ellen Wolfe

Turning 65 and retiring offered the space to pause and explore the next stage of life. In September I drove from Cookeville, TN where I had been living for 20 years to vacation with my mom and sisters who live in

NH, present at a Horticultural Therapy conference in Burlington, VT and explore sustainable living communities. While visiting the Montpelier Farmers Market I inquired of a woman selling herbs and mushrooms what she knew about sustainable farming communities. She asked me what I had to offer such a place. The question made me think. What did I have to offer? I told her I was a former school teacher, a Life Coach, a horticultural therapist, was active in 12-step recovery work and wanted to return to my roots in Vermont. She said with skills like that you won’t have any trouble getting in. “Getting in?” I thought. I don’t want a job. I just want to be in community, garden and be of service. She told me to google recovering farming communities. That evening I did and up popped Inner Fire. I emailed Beatrice and inquired about a visit, and she invited me to visit Monday morning. Inner Fire’s sprawling farm house and setting reminded me of my childhood home in Westminster, VT. As Beatrice showed me around, she told me there was a job opening, a house to rent around the corner and would I come? Clearly the Universe was leading. I went back to Tennessee, closed my Life Coaching business, packed my belongings, sold my greenhouse and moved six weeks later. Brookline Vermont feels like home. Working with seekers at Inner Fire is doing life coaching, horticultural therapy, healing recovery work in an ongoing practice, rather than in an office or scattered community gardens. The move to Vermont and Inner Fire is clearly a soulful move toward wholeness.

## The Creative Living Community

Inner Fire is a sanctuary of sorts. Located in a peaceful setting at the end of the valley, it is a healing place removed from the challenging aspects of contemporary culture.

After the year-long program, a reintegration into society is called for. We have long felt the need to create social forms that support that process.

A group of five individuals, including parents of current and former seekers, is working on establishing a vessel to meet this need. We are calling it the Creative Living Community, and would like to see it situated in or near Brattleboro. Residents should have access to possible jobs, volunteer opportunities, social and cultural activities, and all of the amenities of town.

A house manager will support the residents where needed, providing the basis for a shared life together. Some residents may want to be there briefly as a transition, while others may be looking for a long-term supportive environment.

We are aiming for a vibrant, substance-free lifestyle that could be attractive to us all.

Michael Steinrueck





## Practical Work at IF

The gardening season came to an end a while ago. The beds, cold frames and even partially the greenhouse lie covered in a thick blanket of snow. Now the weather largely dictates what happens out of doors. After every snow fall there's lots of snow to shovel. Often we are out building the new chicken coop on its hay wagon frame. On cold days everyone prefers to keep warm by splitting and stacking firewood. And when it gets extremely cold, we may even find an indoor activity.

The most exciting project of the winter has been the chicken coop. The seekers helped draft the design, and have greatly expand-

ed their carpentry skills. The roof and siding are on, and the focus is now on the details of windows, vents, doors, etc. We will be ordering about 40 chicks soon, and have been discussing breeds and laying capacities. It will be wonderful to have animals on site, supplying us with our own eggs.

Cooking with Audrie is an important part of life at IF, which we plan to profile in the next newsletter. Apart from that, house-cleaning happens weekly at the Inner Fire home, Red House, and seeker bedrooms. This caring for living spaces promotes caring for our inner spaces, and builds a good sense of how to penetrate and structure the environment we live in. After completing the cleaning we check in with each oth-

er to share what we accomplished and how it was for us.

Giving to the community in all of these ways can be very rewarding, and increases the sense of belonging.

Zach and Michael



## Laura Young

*Laura joined us in the autumn to care for the office. To introduce her, we asked her some questions. Here are her answers.*

**1. If Inner Fire were a human organism, what would be your role in helping it thrive?**

Being pragmatic, practical, and a harmonizer by nature, I take in what is happening around and seed pathways of communication, forms and processes that help create balance, allowing those around me to move forward together, with what they each do best. Liking this to a body system, would be the human balance system. Balance is the ability to maintain the body's center of mass over its base of support.

**2. What in your previous life prepared you for this role?**

A lot of what is involved in this role, the kind of place IF is, and the pioneering stage IF is in, is also who I am by nature - driven by vision and meaningful work, inspired in a pioneering environment and motivated by the formational process.

Being the 2nd of 5 girls, I had a lot of household responsibilities early on. I discovered the importance of listening and caring about each one in my family and found ways to work within what was important to each of them.

Being an administrative assistant at Northland, A Church Distributed in Longwood, FL for 15 years, and then Assistant Store Manager at the Herb House for 3.5 years also prepared me for this role at IF. My arrival at Northland was during its "late teen" years. I learned how to work and serve in a constantly changing environment and was included as part of the organizational development of a non-profit. I learned how to care for colleagues and parishioners alike while remaining aligned with the vision, mission and goals of the church.

Further life experiences propelled my interest in natural healing. I became driven to find ways of addressing mind and soul health issues on a natural level. This actually is what led me to work at the Herb House in Winter Park, FL.

**3. How would you describe your impressions of IF so far?**



When I first read about Inner Fire on our website, I had an immediate connection, like feeling familiar with someone you have never met,

but always knew must exist. IF reaches the soul level, doesn't just talk about it. The deep healing approach IF uses to address the challenges people with mind and soul health issues face, rings true deep inside of me.

I'm actually very impressed with how IF is doing at this stage of development. The level of transparency, vulnerability, openness, skill and expertise that exists here is foundational for a healthy growth and future. There is also a keen awareness of the areas in which to grow and where we need help.

**4. In what ways do you think you will be able to grow at IF?**

A LOT

1. I see myself growing old with Inner Fire, delving into the study and first hand practice of non-profit management.
2. I would also love to help find ways for people who cannot afford to come here to be able to participate.
3. I am also very interested in biodynamic gardening. I aspire to have a garden of my own to support my family's health and see myself growing in that area and inspiring others to do the same.
4. The whole aspect of living in an intentional community is motivating for the reason that it can support and sustain the vulnerable for whom I have a keen sensitivity. I am curious to see what part my family and I could play in such an endeavor.
5. I also see myself growing in the area of mentoring seekers on a deeper level. I am grateful to those who have birthed Inner Fire to serve this vulnerable population and for the opportunity it allows me to serve, using my whole life experiences, gifts, passions, skills and dreams.



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