



From Kabat House

Mary Densmore

Like many of the great things in life, communities pass through times of change. We've passed through times of growth and welcomed many new friends, but now we are experiencing a period of change not surrounding the coming and going of others, but a period of placing roots, settling down and growing deeper in our relationships with one another.

Coming out of summer, many of us in community and especially those of us who live at Kabat House were feeling a little exhausted of our larger open meals on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. What once started as smaller, irregular meals eventually became larger social gatherings. I contribute much of their success to the amazingly talented and dedicated cooks and recognize that they were a weekly touchstone of connection and fun. People returned week after week with such regularity and inviting their friends that on some weeks we were reaching numbers upwards of 40 or 50 people. Coming into winter and realizing we could no longer scatter among picnic tables, under trees, or on benches in the yard, we knew we had to make some changes. We also recognized how our guests often were not present at the meals; they were hiding in their rooms or would come just long enough to eat a little food and then run. As we discerned how to make some changes, we knew we needed to alter not just a dinner schedule, but shift the culture of the house away from a place of constant social activity: From a place towards a home where all of us, especially the guests, could rest, be at ease, and feel safe and comfortable. Through all the discernment and meetings, I kept thinking, "What is a home? What would it look like to create a home here?" While in many ways I am still sitting with these questions, we were certain we were ready to slow down the opening and closing of the front door. We eventually decided to take a break from the open meals and limit the amount the house is used by those who don't live there.

In the months that followed these decisions we weren't sure what would come of them. The weeks passed and fewer and fewer friends came by, and I felt the loss of our open meals and seeing many people I love daily. But in shifting my focus towards hospitality (which was one of the main reasons for

making the changes to begin with,) I began to see how organically our household was beginning to develop, how there was less of a distinction between "worker" and "guest", but instead a group of people working together to live together well. We meet once a month to intentionally check-in about how things are going in the house, but it is in the day-to-day interactions and subtleties that I see a new culture developing.

I couldn't have been more delighted with this culture-shift in our house. The changes were slow, small and almost unnoticeable, but looking back, I realize we have come a long way.

There may be no more late night sing-a-longs with friends, but William and Enrique tell me jokes from their childhood as I brush my teeth; no more big open meals, but monthly potlucks and roundtables on the first Fridays of every month. And, my favorite, I spend way less time cleaning and putting away things, but instead the house is cleaner and better maintained as we all take responsibility for the



A gathering at Kabat House for Enrique's birthday - Danny, Heather, Enrique, Douglas and Sarah. Photo by Mary Densmore.

house and check-in with each other when work isn't getting done.

The guests are now not only present at meals, but also usually the ones to prepare and clean up. Often we will share multiple meals together in the same day, and we are learning to enjoy each others cooking. They eat my usual oatmeal with raisins and apples for breakfast, and I thoroughly enjoy Byron's handmade tortillas. We spent a delightful evening celebrating Christmas with music, dancing, and food that was a true communal effort and celebration.

Just prior to Christmas we welcomed a new guest, Guillermo. Because we are so much unlike any other shelter, we can often be a confusing place to transition to as an outsider. I was amazed at how everyone worked together to get him oriented. While one person was teaching him how to make coffee, someone else was cooking him breakfast, and another was getting him a pair of shoes.

I left our last monthly meeting laughing and grinning and reflecting on these shifts. I still am not sure what exactly a "home" means to me, but at least I know now that we are headed in that direction. ♦



Mary Densmore is really loving teaching yoga to children, and she is already dreaming about having her own classroom next year.