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Conversation of a Quieter Life Shared at LLLC

By Lou Fancher



The Lorences' tiny 144-square-foot house

Imagining herself bereft of life's purpose, Diana Lorence found peace, passion and paradise in a tiny, 12-foot-square house. And then, after seven years spent living in the home lit only by a fire with her husband and soulmate, Michael Lorence, she made the marvelous decision to share it with the world.

Innermost House is a structure, an idea, an architectural manifestation of being lost, then found. It is a tale of search and self-rescue. For now, it is a website and a story that lives and breathes its essence most vividly in the physical bodies of the Lorences and the minds and memories of guests fortunate enough to have visited. Innermost House still exists on privately owned land; the couple now lives in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Which is why a rare, one-hour presentation Nov. 5 by Diana Lorence at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center was precious. Displaying

poster-size photos, Lorence introduced an intimate audience of approximately 20 people to the 11-by-7 foot living room in which Lorence and her husband sat knee-to-knee, the 5-by-3 foot kitchen, the bedroom loft with its peaked, 12-foot-high fir plank ceiling. Lorence transformed fresh market vegetables and goods into stews, pottages and bread cooked in a cast iron pot over embers in their much-cherished fireplace. The home's coastal mountain clearing in Northern California was a crossroads long followed by animal wildlife, providing a constant parade.

With a wall of reference books that Lorence said had immense personality and were "covered in almost-white paper for the quietness," conversation was their primary activity. Without electricity, beeswax candles and light from the fire illuminated their lives and provided heat. Firewood came from branches in the nearby orchard - wood that would otherwise have been discarded. A decision to install a conventional septic system provided the limited running water they used for cooking, sponge baths and to operate the toilet in the closet-size bathroom.

Innermost Home was designed with simple materials - plaster, yellow pine, redwood, cedar - by Lorence's husband, whose background includes architecture and textile design. By extension, he has turned his skills to an intriguing occupation that includes fashioning secret hideaways for high-powered executives in need of respite while conducting private conversations that ennoble their spirits. Built by the Lorences in 2004 with one assistant, Innermost House took nine months and one day to complete.

"We rarely left the property. We expected to live there the rest of our lives. It turned out that was not what happened but it was a wonderful way to live," Lorence said.

In rooms she said were designed to fit her body, Lorence created a life that fit her innermost needs. A work history of jobs lost when they failed to provide labor that she found meaningful and over 20 years of searching worldwide with her husband for a place of serenity resolved themselves in the 144-square-foot home. "The house taught me how to live. I was competent and that gave me confidence. I started having guests come because I loved my world. The funny thing is, they loved it too."

But like any worthwhile story, conflict entered. Four years after a generous friend had allowed them to build and live in Innermost House, he sold the property and the Lorences were forced to

depart. Back in the world, Lorence became physically ill and her husband desperately determined to regain the partner who "asked more questions than a 2-year-old, but with the insight of a mature, fascinating woman." They asked the new landowners if they could return. Granted a second period of three years in the home, they grew to treasure even the ashes in the fire. "They contained so much of our lives," Lorence said.

Mysteries are meant to be only imperfectly or partially understood. Innermost House and its effect on actual or virtual visitors is in some ways impossible for Lorence to define - yet its power emboldens her to speak publicly, something she never expected. "There was no thought of speaking about it. But once we lost the house, a woman persuaded me to talk about it. I found out there are people who identified with (my) answer to whatever is missing out there."

Ironically and poetically, the simplicity of their external lives - no room for accumulating possessions, plentiful time for face-to-face talking and side-by-side chores - caused their inner consciousness to bloom. "Traveling the distance" between her pinpoint detailed focus and her husband's broad-view perspective - a difference she demonstrated with pinched fingers, then a sunrise-to-sunset sweeping gesture - provided an endless landscape for intellectual exploration. "We both changed each other a lot," Lorence said. Her husband said 33 years observing "a very unusual woman" who has a vision of a world where everything and likely everyone are united, has perhaps been his rescue from what otherwise might have been an existence comprised of materiality and superficial relationships. At Innermost House, he said, "Night and day were more one thing than two things. Man and woman were more one person than two people."

Since publishing her first blog article, Lorence's story has appeared in "House Beautiful," "Fine Homebuilding," "Tiny House Blog," and other publications and websites. Innermost House will be featured in a published book in 2016. The Lorences recently founded the Innermost House Foundation with the goal of creating a living retreat where people can experience time well spent in a place not unlike paradise on earth.

To learn more, visit <http://www.innermosthouse.com/>.



The 11-by-7 foot living room Photos provided, copyright Diana Lorence

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