



# ***Raven's Bread***

## ***Food for Those in Solitude***

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### ***Vol: 8 No: 1 February 2004***

***Raven's Bread*** is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. The newsletter seeks to affirm and support this way of life. ***Raven's Bread*** is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters, and information from hermits themselves. The ***Raven's Bread*** Web page is an abbreviated version of our full printed newsletter, which also includes a **Bulletin Board** and **Reader Forum** featuring responses to a quarterly discussion topic.

Please send your written contributions, as well as address changes and subscriptions to:

***Raven's Bread***  
***18065 Hwy 209***  
***Hot Springs, NC 28743***

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$8.00 in USA and \$10.00 US currency for foreign subscriptions. (Drafts drawn on US banks are the most convenient form of payment by foreign subscribers.) Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

To E-mail ***Raven's Bread*** directly click on this link: [fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

***Raven's Bread*** (formerly ***Marabou***) derives its name from the experience of Elijah, the prophet, in 1 Kgs.17: 1-6. A raven, sent by God, nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (the Cutting Place).

## **zzzzzz Thoughts in Solitude zzzzzz**

**By: Maria Kersten, Dadirri Place, Netherlands**

Hermits, solitaires, deserts and solitude have always been associated as belonging together. Yet the lifestyles of present day hermits and solitaires are very different from those of the past. What they do have in common however, is a certain desert spirituality as inspiration for their way of life. Desert spirituality is above all focussed on the inner essentials. It is about living a God-directed life, and about fidelity in following the lead of the Spirit.

Desert spirituality is not tied to the physical environment we call desert. Rather it is the graced call of a powerful attraction toward God. It is a surrender to the spirit of quietude, and a graced fascination to seek the face of God in silence, solitude and interiority. It is a seeking that will eventually reveal the presence of the God-Mystery within the cave of one's own heart. This discovery will bring about a transformed vision, able to see God's beauty, goodness and transforming love in everything. All that is becomes a theophany, mediating God's transcendent and immanent presence in the NOW MOMENT.

Desert spirituality is a mysterious journey towards God and in God, within the ordinariness of daily life and the humdrum of routine. It is a journey, which eventually leads to a crumbling of formal structures and supports, until all that remains is a mystery of life and love, which will not be denied. A mystery, ever enticing and irresistible, yet always veiled and hidden in the blinding light and luminous darkness which surrounds the Divine Presence.

Desert spirituality is also the graced experience of a compelling hope and conviction that all is well and will be well, even as one weeps in solidarity with those who mourn. It is living with a transformed vision and consciousness that all is charged with the

Mystery of the "I AM" of the desert. All is destined for glory in Jesus Christ who now in his resurrection is the loving wisdom of God: I AM engaged with the whole universe. All is filled with a mysterious creating and transforming spirit of life and love at work within all of creation to bring about the fullness of life and unity for which it has been destined.

Desert spirituality is the willingness to listen deeply to life, its pain and joy, its darkness and light, its dying and rising. Desert spirituality is encountering God in everything in the freedom of the NOW MOMENT. Desert spirituality is the experience of desert: endurance and fidelity observed out of love in emptiness, darkness, and loneliness. Desert spirituality is about the riches of solitude and the joy of knowing oneself to be unconditionally and extravagantly loved. Consequently, desert spirituality is above all a faith-filled love commitment accepted with the finality of an irrevocable pledge.

## **A Word from Still Wood**

Flicking back the drapes at 5:15 this morning, we discovered diamonds glistening on our deck in the 8° temperature and a deep dark sky equally studded with glittering gems, sharp and brilliant in the intense cold. It hit me. Why, when we humans have done our best to destroy the world has God renewed it, in beauty, day after day? Why are we not left with the ugliness we have done our level best to "create" on our own?

A further question then arose: why has God made the earth such a supremely lovely place to begin with? Why not make a strictly utilitarian place where his creatures could work out their salvation "in fear and trembling?" That would have been adequate, would it not? A gentle Voice responded: "My dear, I restore the beauty of your world over and over so that you will never doubt my love nor my forgiveness. I myself am Beauty beyond imagining, so I give you this faint mirror that you will want to come to Me...out of love, not fear."

In the stark beauty of this midwinter dawn, I realize once again that we are made by a God who is not satisfied with mere sufficiency; who HAD to make a world of lavish abundance and sweet loveliness because that is who this Supreme Lover is. Scripture says so simply, "God fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome" (Wisdom 1,14). So, "I will call this to mind, as my reason to have hope: the favors of the Lord are not exhausted, his mercies are not spent; they are renewed each morning, so great is his faithfulness (Lam. 3,21-24)."

Yet one more question inevitably arises. How is it that I have eyes to see and leisure to attend the beauty surrounding me, when so many, perhaps the majority, of God's children do not? To that I have no answer. I do know that "to whom much is given, much shall be required" and that I have a serious responsibility to appreciate and praise our Maker and Lover on behalf of all those who do not or cannot, because they are overwhelmed with misery or suffering griefs not of their making, and certainly, not of their deserving. At this point, the Mystery overcomes me and I can do nothing but "sit alone and in silence, hoping (on the behalf of many,) for the saving help of the Lord (ibid. 26)." Such is the gift and the charge to those called to lives of solitude and prayer.

In this issue, **RB** begins a series of short personal stories of vocations to solitude, offered by readers to the rest of us. We herewith thank you and trust your gift will inspire others to share likewise! We continue the lively discussion of how best to describe the relationship that exists among those nourished by the Raven's "bread," and we complete (at long last!) the **Survey Reflections**. By May, we hope to offer a complete compilation in a single Resource of all the survey data we have published since August of 2001.

Many of you now contact us via e-mail. We ask that you include the words "**Raven's Bread**" in the **Subject Heading** so that your missives will not be lost when we delete the hundreds of spam e-mails we receive daily. Thanks and let us continue to pray for one another!

**With Grateful love,  
Karen & Paul**

**Forests and fields, sun and wind and sky, earth and  
water,**

**all speak the same language: peace, solitude,  
silence.**

**Thomas Merton  
(with thanks to *Heron Dance*)**

## **The 2001 Survey of Raven's Bread Readers**

Since "The Survey" was initiated more than 620 copies were mailed to our readership. Over 175 became participants. A truly gratifying experience that continues to generate a wide range of responses. It says something wonderful about everyone who cooperated in this project, making it truly reflective of what is happening in our own time re solitary lifestyles. We continue to receive requests for **Survey Results** and back issues containing the summaries we have printed thus far.

The current print issue of **RB** (February 2004) features the results of the Last of Ten Reflection Questions: "*What publications/connections have proven helpful in supporting and educating you in your solitary vocation?*"

"The writings mentioned in the survey cover an astonishing gamut of spiritualities and religious persuasions - from the Bible to the Bhagavad Gita; from the writings of the Desert Fathers to Thomas Merton and Maggie Ross; proving once again that the eremitical life is a universal phenomena." from editor's introduction, pg. 4 of February 2004 Print Issue)

We are still offering the initial "big picture" summary from the eleven categories covered in the Survey's check-off section (Personal Information, Location, Religious Affiliation and Status, Lifestyle, Prayer Forms and Religious Practices, Financial Situation, Spiritual Direction, and Difficulties) which was published in the August 2001 Issue. In the next issue, we hope to offer a complete compilation in a single resource of all the survey data we have published since August 2001.

If you are interested in obtaining the **2001 Raven's Bread Survey Results**, these initial reports are available upon request to our online readers for \$3.00 each (U.S. currency):

**By Mail:**

Raven's Bread  
18065 Hwy 209  
Hot Springs, NC 28743

**By Telephone:** 1-828-622-3750

**By E-Mail:** [fredette@nlink.net](mailto:fredette@nlink.net)

**The small truth has words that are clear;  
the great truth has great silence.**

**TAGORE  
(with thanks to *Heron Dance*)**

## **zzz Stories of Solitude zzz**

As I finished reading the last issue of Raven's Bread, I wondered if you ever featured stories from subscribers. I would be so interested to read of how others live, how they support themselves, what drew them to a solitary life, and how they deal with the world. Since I ask, I guess I should give, so here goes.

I am by nature a quiet person, a solitary hermit for sure. I, too, prefer the cooing of the mourning doves, the cheerful quirping of the mountain quail, the wind in the pines. I go to town for supplies and return home to once again be in the Silence. All my life I have

felt odd, not blending into society, although I have worked as a registered nurse and at a library. Now I remain at home. My family teases me saying I am tethered to my cabin on a fifty-foot rope. Perhaps there is some truth to that. As Emily Dickinson once said, "Home is so agreeable why would anyone want to leave?" Indeed!

At times during my life (I am now 53), I have felt so out of place in this fast-paced, aggressive, frenetic society. I think, "What is wrong with me? Why am I not with the program?" Over the years I have found much comfort in the writings of other solitary people - hermits. Not always easy to come across, but when I did, I always felt a sense of relief that I was not alone.

One book I recently discovered was Hojoki. What a delight! Even though I live in a small 720 sq. ft. cabin, I also have a 10 foot square hut, rustic, primitive. I used to go there a lot but over the past few years, it has become a sort of hermitage for the little "mice monks." I do believe they meditate up their in their little gray robes. Though I never actually see them, they leave me little droppings to inform they are making good use of the place. Reading Hojoki made me smile as I thought of my own little hut.

***By: Barabara Mankoski, Jacksonville, OR***

I began as a solitary about five years ago - like other things in my life, such as being vegetarian or developing a particular spiritual path, I didn't declare an intent and set out, but rather followed the inclinations of my heart and spirit and later defined the outcome (in this case, "hermit") based on looking back at what had transpired.

I was always an introvert but in earlier years, I depended heavily on others for validation. I wanted friends to prove I was popular; I wanted a relationship to prove I was lovable. I was also a high-energy person who wanted to do activities with others, for safety (in case I got hurt on a hike) and so I wouldn't stand out as odd. If I went to the movies alone, I'd pretend I was with someone who had gone for refreshments - saving a seat, turning to look back as if watching for someone - that provided a cover until the lights went out.

I went cross-country skiing once, about 18 years ago, when I was in my early thirties and met others who asked me, "Are you lost?" Since I was within sight of the parking lot, it seemed like an odd question so I said, "No, why?" The answer: "Because you're alone." "I came alone," I responded and they cheered their support, as if I were crossing some finish line.

About that time I decided to stay home alone one Thanksgiving rather than accept those kind invitations from casual acquaintances where you end up sitting around listening to stories about people you don't know. But when the day came, snow banked against the window of my tiny place, and I realized the entire small town was locked up tight. Panic set in and it was a dismal and horrible several days until I could return to work and activity.

By comparison I now live alone in joy. I've backpacked around the world alone. Cell phones provide an element of safety. I'm getting older and slowing down - I choose to stay home a lot more. And I no longer care whether I am popular or lovable to others.

I think a large part of this last is the result of living in the moment, developed over years by activities such as meditation and Tai Chi, since (for me, anyway) the feelings of being odd or lonely came from self-talk or culturally-imposed notions about what life "should" be like. Without that diatribe going on in my head, with only peace and silence, I can enjoy the wonder of solitude.

That I live totally without contact from others is, to me, a blessing. I have no siblings or children, my parents have been dead for 28 years, other relatives are mostly 3,000 miles away. That spares me many of the challenges of balance that I read from others who write in - making time for others vs. time for self. I tried for 25 years to form a committed loving relationship but always ended up walking the streets crying in lonely rage. I finally saw that I was resentful when another person robbed me of solitude, and I therefore probably made unreasonable demands for attention, in search of an "up-side" to having that person around. Once that insight hit home, the path was clear - I didn't have to keep trying to get what I really, underneath it all, didn't want. I could focus on what I did want: a deepening of my solitary life. These insights and changes proved to be the surprises, and also the help on the journey.

***By: Tracy O'Connell, Rio Dell, CA***

**Discussion Topic for May 2004 Issue:**

What piece of advice did you receive or would you give to someone starting out in a life of solitude?

**Deadline: March 31, 2004**

**TAOIST MEDITATION**

Close your eyes and you will see clearly  
Cease to listen and you will hear truth  
Be silent and your heart will sing  
Seek no contact and you will find union  
Be still and you will move forward in the tide of the spirit  
Be gentle and you will not need strength  
Be patient and you will achieve all things  
Be humble and you remain entire."  
*from Heron Dance*

**"A Suggestion"**

Trying to get in touch with another hermit? Want contact from a hermit or solitary? Aware of opportunities that may be of interest to solitaires? Have you a service to offer? Are you looking to locate or re-locate a hermitage? Why not place your message on the **Bulletin Board** of *Raven's Bread* (printed version). Requests are posted **free of charge** for our regular subscribers.

**Resources Available from *Raven's Bread***

(all prices include postage)

*Readings in Spirituality - Annotated Bibliography* by Sharon Jeanne Smith **31pp. \$15.00**

*Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life* by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$13.00**

*Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life"* by Jean Beyer SJ, 1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp. \$3.00**

*Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603* by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp. \$12.00**

*Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit* by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$7.50**

*Statutes for Hermits* by The Bishops of France (1989) **12 pp. \$6.00**

**Fellowship of Solitaires**

Comprised of and open to religious solitaires of all stripes. The Fellowship is ecumenical and has no official connections with any church. People may join the Fellowship either as Members or as Associates. All receive a regular Newsletter and a List of Members, so that they may be prayerfully aware of each other in their different paths and to make contact with each other if they so wish.

Correspondent: Eve Baker, Coed Glas, Talgarth Road, Bronllys, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0HN

To email Fellowship of Solitaries directly click on this link:[solitaries@onetel.com](mailto:solitaries@onetel.com)  
To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaries click on this link:<http://www.solitaries.org.uk/>

Four Articles by Kenneth C. Russell. Reprinted by permission from "Review for Religious" (excellent footnotes & references)

**Being a Hermit: Where and How** 12 pp, \$6.00  
**Acedia - The Dark Side of Commitment** 4 pp. \$2.00  
**The dangers of Solitude** 5 pp. \$2.50  
**Must hermits Work?** 10 pp. \$5.00

## 2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from 11 categories (personal information, location, religious affiliation and status, lifestyle, prayer forms and religious practices, financial situation, spiritual direction, difficulties).  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.5 No.3. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from First Reflection Question: "For me the grace and essence of solitary living is..."  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.5 No.4. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Second Reflection Question: "How did you come to recognize your call to religious / solitary / hermit life?"  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.1. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Third Reflection Question: "Reactions of others to my choice of eremitic life..."  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.2. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Fourth Reflection Question: "For members of religious congregations: Reactions of the community to my choice of hermit life..."  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.3. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Fifth Reflection Question: "For former members of religious congregations: What prompted you to leave? Was your departure related to your attraction to solitude..."  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.4. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Sixth Reflection Question: "If you are married and attracted to Solitude, how do you work this out with your spouse?"  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.7 No.1. **1 page \$2.00**

Compilation of data from Seventh Reflection Question: "What has been your experience of finding spiritual guidance?"  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.7 No.2. **2 pages \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Eighth Reflection Question: "What limitations do you set to social relationships? Family Obligations?"  
Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.7 No.3. **2 pages \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Ninth Reflection Question: "Do you cultivate an environmentally responsible lifestyle"

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.7 No.4. 2 pages \$3.00

Compilation of data from Tenth Reflection Question: "What publications/connections have proven helpful in supporting and educating you in your solitary vocation?"

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.8 No.1. 1 page \$2.00

## Raven's Rest

The Silence...The Solitude...The Solace of God...

Retreatants welcome to schedule time beginning April 4, (Palm Sunday) 2004 at **Raven's Rest** Hermitage (a fully furnished apartment with kitchenette & private entrance) here at **Still Wood**. Offers opportunity to experience solitude and silence on a forested mountainside of the Newfound Range in the rural Smokies, approximately 35 miles N.E. of the Great Smokies National Park and 35 miles N.W. of Asheville. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Suggested offering \$25.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

**Paul and Karen Fredette**  
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### BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**The Life of Antony, The Coptic Life & The Greek Life** by Athanasius of Alexandria, Translated by Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis. *The life of Antony provided the model for subsequent saints' biographies and constituted 'the most important document of early monasticism.'* Antony, as translator Tim Vivian highlights, was a Christian ascetic who "exhibited a life, an identity, that is attuned to reality, material and spiritual, and so has the only sort of power that matters, the power that comes from swimming strongly with the stream of truth." (forward by Rowan Williams) 2003. Softcover, 290 pp. \$29.95. Cistercian Publications, Institute of Cistercian Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008. [www.spencerabbey.org/cistpub/](http://www.spencerabbey.org/cistpub/)

**The Marriage of All and Nothing, Selected Writings of Barbara Dent** Edited by Mary Freiburger. *"The finesse and expertise with which (Barbara) writes, help others see the hand of God in their own journey in the dark night. She has been a source of consolation and strength for everyone that I know who is perplexed by his own experience. Her vocation is unique in that she was married, is a mother of three and a grandmother of ten, and is a Carmelite hermit."* From the introduction by Father Bob Mitchell, OFM. 2002. 272 pp. Paperback. \$11.95. ICS Publications, 2131 Lincoln Road, NE, Washington, DC 20002-1199. Tel: 800-832-8489. [www.icspublications.org](http://www.icspublications.org)

**Maria of Olonets, Desert Dweller of the Northern Forests** by Bishop Nikodim of Belgorod. *This account of an ascetic of Holy Russia a hundred years ago opens a new world to western religious eyes, that of the men and women desert dwellers*

*of the Northern Forests. "The account of Maria of Olonets is perhaps the most detailed in all spiritual literature, in shedding light on the feminine aspect of anchoritism, " writes Abbot Herman in the introduction to this edition.*1996. 111 pp. Paperback. \$8.95. St. Herman Press, 10 Beegum Gorge Road, P.O.Box 70, Dept. MO, Platina, CA 96076



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