



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 9 No: 1 February 2005

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 Site offers an **ABBREVIATED** version of our full printed newsletter, which also includes a **Bulletin Board**, a **Reader Forum** featuring responses to a quarterly discussion topic, and a **Letters** section from the readership.

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

Raven's Bread
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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

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 On Solitude** zzzzzz

By: Dale Salwak

**Excerpted from the introduction to "The Wonders of Solitude"
(New World Library 1998)**

At one time or another all of us, I believe, hear the call to solitude. It can come upon us at any moment, under any circumstances - during times of good health or the trials of infirmity, after abandonment or the death of a loved one, in childhood or later in life, in crowds, voluntarily or imposed. Sometimes, it sneaks up on us, much like the persistent aches of a hunger that no sustenance from our fellow human beings can satisfy. Or it beckons as a still, quiet voice from within - the voice of God.

At such moments many of us feel a desire, as Henry David Thoreau did well over a century ago, to go to the woods to "live deliberately; to front only the essential facts of life," to remove ourselves from our peripheral concerns, from the pressures of a madly active world, and to return to the center where life is sacred - a humble miracle and mystery. Nothing could be worse, Thoreau wrote, than to come to the end of life and "discover that I had not lived."

As Thoreau suggests, in confronting "only the essential facts of life" we meet ourselves face-to-face; and for many of us, that experience can be rewarding, often life-changing, raising us to the heights of ecstasy, self-awareness, and creativity. In solitude, we may find a new beginning, an opportunity to break old habits. In solitude, we may find increased sensitivity, compassion, and empathy. In solitude, we may find the truth of ourselves, restore our dulled senses, and clarify and reorder our priorities. Above all, in solitude, we may find God, and come to hear that voice.

Whether for reasons of preparation, study, creation, penitence, self-examination,

reflection, purification, or prayer - solitude is the most fundamental of all the spiritual disciplines, and we must return to it again and again if we hope to hear the soft voice of inspiration, if we want to live fully realized lives.

This is not to say that solitude always requires absence from people. Some of our most meaningful times with others have been spent in shared silence while walking along a beach, sitting on the steps, reading. With friends, relatives, even strangers - at home, at work, in houses of worship, in business, in marriage, on a crowded city street - we can still retire within ourselves and be immersed in solitude. Indeed, some people seek out crowds so that anonymity can help them feel alone.

And yet, in a secular world that devalues those who make time to listen to themselves, in a society that tends to equate a need for solitude with laziness, inactivity, and nonproductiveness, I suspect that many people have lost possession of what Emily Dickinson has called the "appetite for silence." In school and at home, among friends and at play, there seems to be ever-lessening opportunities for quiet time apart. And as people grow older and their lives become steadily more hectic and fragmented, they find themselves caught up in a race against time with no time for themselves.

How do we find solitude? Why is it so important to our lives? And how can we reconcile what most of us feel to be the daily tug-of-war between the spirit of community and the spirit of solitariness? Answers to these questions can be found buried in the writings of the variously solitary lives of a wide range of people - poets and novelists, playwrights, essayists and politicians, artists, explorers, philosophers, psychologists, physicians, theologians. Out of the resulting collection I have brought together the best and then clustered the material around several important themes that are the basis for the divisions in this book. For those who have the habit of solitude, and for those who do not, I hope that what follows will be a welcome companion for encouragement, comfort, and inspiration.

A Word from Still Wood

Your Raven is flying out to you a bit later than usual because, in early January, we traveled to NH to say good-bye to a very special woman - Paul's mother. Georgette passed peacefully to the Lord (for whom she had been rather impatiently waiting!) early on December 31st. We joined Paul's five siblings and their families in giving a sad but grateful send-off to the mother who had become friend and confidante to her grown children and eleven grandchildren. During the months she had lived with us, she took great satisfaction in folding and taping **RB** on a low table pushed close to her wheelchair. Every label affixed by her arthritic fingers carried her prayers for that person.

As we groped for a way to describe what this beloved lady meant to us, we came across this paragraph in a book recommended by an **RB** reader. *"Simple kindness to one's self and all that lives is the most powerful transformational force of all. It produces no backlash, has no downside, and never leads to loss or despair. It increases one's own true power without exacting any toll. But to reach maximum power, such kindness can permit no exceptions, nor can it be practiced with the expectation of some selfish reward. Its effect is as far-reaching as it is subtle. In a universe where "like goes to like" and "birds of a feather flock together," we attract to us what we emanate."*

Georgette died emanating a love so genuine that her daughters remarked on the radiance that surrounded her worn features. Doing for others had given meaning to her life and when a stroke limited her ability to cook and sew for those she loved, Georgette wondered why she was still here. She found her answer in her daily prayer for everyone who crossed her path. In her soft voice which never quite lost its native French lilt, she would assure us all: "Do not forget. I am praying for you." And we are certain that she still is!

A death always reminds us how swiftly time passes. As we began laying out this issue, we were startled to realize that we are approaching its tenth year. A question arises. How best can we mark this anniversary? What would you suggest that we do? Publish a bound compilation of the best reflections culled from past issues? Develop a profile of the hermit of the 21st century distilled from the results of the 2001 Survey? Invite notable spiritual writers to contribute a reflection to an anniversary volume? Publish life stories of contemporary hermits and solitaries?

We look forward to hearing your ideas and suggestions. When you get in touch with us (and we are certain that you will!) we ask that if you email us, please put **Raven's Bread** in the subject line so we can sort out **your** letters from all the junk mail we receive.

With Lent at hand, let us each plunge a little deeper into our cherished silence and

solitude and then generously share what treasures we receive in those precious moments of Communion with the Giver of all "bread."

God keep you, dear friends, in the loving kindness that binds us together and enables us to keep our war-weary and weather-wracked world on course towards the fullness of God's loving kindness. As always, let us pray for one another!

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

**You must give birth to your images.
They are the future waiting to be born.
Fear not the strangeness you feel.
The future must enter into you long before it
happens...
Just wait for the birth...
for the hour of new clarity.
Rainer Maria Rilke**

zzzStories of Solitudezzz

I am a 51-year-old man who has lived in a long-term committed relationship for 22 years. I am not a hermit but feel a craving for solitude. During the last three years, I have had an increase in my prayer life as my schedule now allows me flexibility to spend more time in prayer. I see this as a real grace that I have been granted. I always feel that in years to come my appetite for prayer and solitude will increase.

I am a psychotherapist and now I am in full time private practice. While my work is deeply based on my psychoanalytic training, I feel that I also have grown more comfortable with looking at the spiritual components in my clients' lives. It is a very interesting experience to see that as my prayer life increases, I am also more in tune with the spiritual dimension of my work, and my clients' search for meaning. I recognize an encounter with the Other when I hear it during the course of a session, although it is not always verbalized or articulated as such.

West Caldwell, NJ, USA

For the past twenty years I have both served churches as an ordained clergy and lived in a remote area of Southeast Asia doing agricultural development. When a student, I ran across Thomas Merton who has had a profound impact on my spiritual life ever since. In spite of what many would consider a successful career, I found myself longing for the opportunity to practice the contemplative life more and more. Four years ago I moved to this remote area expressly for the purpose of greater solitude. While this is not true wilderness, it is probably as close as I will come.

I currently live in a converted Quonset shed. I built a small log cabin (10' x 16') to accommodate people who either come to talk about developing their own relationship with God through solitude and acts of compassion, or who want to use it for a day-retreat. It has no utilities and is offered for free. I raise hay to provide improvements to the property and pay taxes. At first I entered into a partnership to be able to raise enough money to purchase my own (very old) haying equipment. The first year I was here I sowed 20 acres of oats by hand. I also make hand-made walking sticks, and some other crafts to add to my income. I am married - my wife recognizes that compassion and contemplation are the two central themes of my life. As a teacher her salary provides for the needs of our children and other family living costs. We truly perform complementary roles in our family and community. We have been married 25 years. Enough glass has now been donated to build a glass-walled octagonal chapel. I

have also been asked to teach and preach on a very regular basis in area churches. I offer this freely but will accept compensation when given.

Outside of my experiences of visiting cloisters, I have had no awareness of or contact with hermits within greater society. Although I do not need the stories in the newsletter to justify what I am doing, it is an encouragement to know that others exist who possibly feel a similar call. I am by no means either a misanthrope or a sociopath. I truly like people. But somehow as a child I learned the benefits of being alone with God. Now is the time to pursue this love.

Durban, MB, Canada

(An Array of) **Discussion Topics for May 2005 Issue:**

What foods do I really need for a healthy life?

Which health products - pills, supplements, etc. - are really necessary?

How many cleaning products do I really require
and which ones damage our earth the least?

Where do I choose to shop?

Do I choose stores that sell products that do not exploit people including their
employees?

Deadline: April 1 (not a joke), 2005

Silence is the folding of the wings of the intellect
to open the door of the heart.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty

zzzDiscerning A Solitary Religious Vocationzzz

**Brother Randall Horton
Anglican Hermit in the Diocese of New York**

(The following dialogue is the conclusion of an article begun in the August 2004 issue of ***Raven's Bread***).

These questions were posed to me in my ten plus years of profession as a hermit in the Anglican tradition. It is neither exhaustive nor necessarily accurate but does represent my own experience. Thomas Paine's words in *The Age of Reason* can apply: "You will do me the justice to remember, that I have always strenuously supported the Right of every Man to his own opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right, makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it."

Q. What happens when you are professed and then your bishop retires? What if your new bishop does not want Solitaries?

A. The new bishop would have no choice, any more than the new bishop can pick and choose which priests he wants in his or her diocese. The bishop is stuck with the personnel he or she is given when becoming Diocesan Ordinary. A bishop may either cause you grief or ignore you entirely. Occasionally you may luck out and get a bishop who understands and values your vocation. But part of vowed obedience is that you don't get to pick and choose anymore than the bishop does. It's rather like when a community gets a new superior - all are stuck with him or her, no matter how you feel.

Q. Where does one go to be trained to live the life of a solitary or a hermit?

A. My personal feeling is that there is only one place to learn the religious life - a novitiate. If I were a bishop I would be very wary about professing anybody who had not been through standard formation in an established religious community. After all, who can teach you how to live the religious life except another religious? But here is the difficulty: formation costs a community both time and money and no community is going to train you if they know you are not intending to stay with them. You may be able to find a community who will train you in exchange for a skill you may have and be willing to give in exchange. In some instances, you may in all honesty feel that you have a communal vocation, and only after entering, find that your vocation lies in the solitary life. (I would never advise anyone to be dishonest with a formation director just to

obtain formation.) If you honestly believe you have a solitary vocation, pray that God will open a door for you. The time you spend waiting will only aid you in your discernment process.

Q. But I am sure I have the vocation. Why must I wait and go through this lengthy process before making my vows?

A. It is good that you are sure. But it is not enough. We can delude ourselves very easily without confirmation through discernment by others. Professing you is a big risk for the bishop who chooses to hear your vows. He must be just as sure as you are that you have a vocation.

Q. Can my rector hear my vows?

A. In the Catholic tradition only a bishop may hear and hold vows outside of a religious community. In order to be canonically official, your vows must be heard and held by a valid bishop. Canonical procedure is that only a Diocesan Ordinary may profess a solitary or hermit if he or she is to be publically recognized as a religious.

Q. What if I choose not to go through the canonical process and just live the life of a hermit without the approval of a bishop?

A. You can do that. Many do. However, without either a bishop or a superior to hold your vow of obedience, no one in the church will consider you to be "for real," no matter how many habits you may buy and wear, or what you may call yourself. Traditionally, it is the vow of obedience which makes one a religious. If recognition doesn't matter to you, then why on earth would you even consider going through the lengthy process to obtain canonical status? I wouldn't.

Q. What does a Rule of Life have to do with making vows?

A. Everything. It is the Rule which defines the vows. The vows vary from solitary to solitary but always include Obedience. The religious life is sometimes referred to as "Life under Rule." There are examples of Rules for Solitaries but in modern times most solitaries or hermits write their own Rule. Part of the formation process itself is the study of Rules of Life and the writing of one.

Silence is one of the great and eloquent arts of conversation.

Thomas More

(with thanks to *Friends of Silence*)

"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 solitaries? 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.

**Hermit Resources Available from *Raven's Bread*
February 2005**

(all prices include postage)

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Annotated Readings in Spirituality - by Sharon Jeanne Smith **21pp. \$5.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$5.00**

Annotated Books on Solitude - **4pp. \$2.00**

JURIDICAL COMMENTARIES

Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life" by Jean Beyer SJ, 1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp. \$2.50**

Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603 by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp. \$5.00**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989)
12 pp. \$2.50

HERMIT RULES

Rules for Hermits (Spanish & English) by Padre Justo, O.P. **9pp. \$2.50**

Eremitic Rule of Life **30pp. \$5.00**

Franciscan Plan of Life in Hermitage **4pp. \$2.00**

Topical Outline for Plan of Eremitical Life **3pp. \$2.00**

HERMIT SURVEYS

Raven's Bread Survey 2001 - Compiled Responses **23pp. \$5.00**

Marabou Questionnaire 1996 - **9pp. \$2.50**

ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$3.00**

Lay Hermits by Rev. Eugene Stockton **8pp. \$2.50**

NCR 2004 "Sacristans of Emptiness" by Rich Heffern **6pp. \$2.50**

Discernment Criteria - "Marabou" 1996 - **6pp. \$2.00**

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

Where God Begins To Be A Woman's Journey into Solitude by Karen Karper

An Authors Guild Back imprint.com edition

To order online, click on this link: www.book.orders@iuniverse.com

Autographed copies (\$12.95 plus \$2.50 postage & handling) are available from:

Raven's Bread

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Fellowship of Solitaries

Comprised of and open to religious solitaries 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

To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaries click on this link:
<http://www.solitaries.org.uk/>

Raven's Rest

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

Retreatants welcome to schedule time beginning April 1, 2005 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:

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[email: fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE WONDERS OF SOLITUDE Edited by Dale Salwak.

In a world that devalues solitary time, this inspirational volume of quotations on the essential importance of solitude aids us in bringing contemplation and silence back into our busy lives. Profesor of literature and religion, Dale Salwek gathers a wonderfully eclectic assortment of thinkers from throughout the ages to reflect on finding solitude at home, in the natural world, in houses of worship and within the heart.

1998. Softcover, 137 pp. \$12.00. New World library, 14 Pamaron Way, Novato, CA 04043 orders: 1-800-972-6657, Ext.52/P>

THE FIRE OF SILENCE AND STILLNESS, An Anthology of Qotations for the Spiritual Journey
Edited by Paul Harris.

This book of spiritual quotations contains not only wisdom from the past, but a wealth of understanding and inspiration from religious guides of the present. It will appeal to all those on the contemplative path, to members of the many Christian meditation groups, and to all those who daily practice the spiritual discipline of silence in prayer.

1996. Softcover 230 pp. \$14.95 Templegate Publishers. Order toll free: 800-367-4844; www.templegate.com; online: orders@templegate.com

THE GREATEST ESCAPE: Adventures in the History of Solitude by David Balcom.

Covering a broad swath of history, Balcom introduces us to powers and resources in solitude that are drowned in the clamor of modern life. He concludes that the experience of solitude can be creative, joyful, enlightening, sometimes all three at once - and that the perennial "fruits of solitude" are open to everyone. Here is an apology for a guide to the greatest of all escapes!

Softcover, \$12.95 Templegate Publishers. Order toll free: 800-367-4844; www.templegate.com; email: orders@templegate.com

WEBSITES OF POSSIBLE INTEREST:

Hermits of St. Bruno. A new site by an **RB** reader in Canada. www.hermitsofstbruno.com



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