



# ***Raven's Bread***

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

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### ***Vol: 7 No: 3 August 2003***

***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**

**Excerpted from Practicing Hermitage**  
**By: Richard Simonelli, Nederland, CO**

Hermitage is the happiness felt in aloneness, solitude, and self containment. It is the inner directed heart and mind. It is not isolation or a shrinking away from relationship. In hermitage we are alone yet never alone because the sense of interconnection with what is is intense and intimate. Self-containment is contentment, and to be a hermit in the best sense is to be content with one's life by not looking outside of the present moment to find wholeness.

Hermitage is living the state or condition of contemplation. Contemplation is being with the basis of every unique thing that makes up our world. This goes by many different names depending on a person's spiritual orientation. Some might call this God. A contemplative is capable of relating with the this and that of the world of diverse phenomena, but he or she has put aside that primary interest in this life in favor of one-pointed contemplation.

In the hermitage of non-duality, the solitary contemplative does not pit solitude and aloneness against the many things of this world. He knows that the very situations which may distract him and call for his attention are at root the same as his contemplation. He knows that the distinction between "real" and "unreal" in an artificial duality of thought. It is all Real. Yet he also knows that actions and affinities have consequences and that some of these consequences serve a happy, meaningful life and some do not.

The practice of hermitage has much to offer an over stimulated and overly social world. How much activity and need for interaction in a social context is really an attempt to escape from the pristine knowledge of who and what we are? How much of the desire

for linkage and connectedness is really an escape from what is? What is the relationship between spirituality in a social context, and the quality of connection with the Mother Essence that gives birth to all that we see? And perhaps most importantly, what balance may be struck between hermitage and social interaction?

Every socially committed person will be strengthened in his or her social commitment if an active life is balanced with periods of solitary retreat. Stress related illness and eventual loss of good judgment, even in social or career endeavors close to an individual's heart, will be lessened if that person does occasional solo time. Solo time rejuvenates social commitment by providing a perspective that is impossible to come by in a life that never takes a break. But it takes some skill to spend quality time alone. Who can teach that skill or provide support for occasional solo retreats? Well, a hermit can.

Hermitage offers community centered individuals the quiet encouragement to face and meet themselves free of the complexity and challenge of social life. The practice of hermitage points out a simplicity that can be healing to the individual, and perhaps ironically, to the very community that thrives on complication. Hermitage heals, because underneath it all, existence is simple, whole, and uncomplicated.

Traditionally, across the world and across many diverse cultures, there have always been hermits. And just as traditionally, hermits have not been the recluses or isolates that modern stereotyping portrays. A careful reading of hermetic experience over both time and place will show that hermits were always interacting with surrounding people or communities. Today, hermits live lives of service within cities or towns just as much as they live off in rural areas. People of community who wisely desire to nurture the hermetic parts of themselves do somehow find the hermits of their area and carry on an appropriate friendship. The hermit has something to offer the community, just as the community has something to offer the hermit.

The jewel at the core of hermitage may be expressed and shared with others in a social context, but that jewel will never be discovered when the mind is turned outward. It is always found in an auspicious moment when the mind is inner directed. Such solitude may be actual, or it may be a solitude of aloneness within social involvements. What is discovered in solitude has the power to create harmony in social situations.

## **A Word from Still Wood**

*"I believe that if one person gains spiritually, the whole world gains, and if one person falls, the whole world falls to that extent." (Mahatma Gandhi)* Do these words ring like a bell in your heart? They can serve as a motto for all of us who cherish solitude as a way of life for they show us how we can be of service to the rest of the world. These words can also serve as a warning when we are tempted to betray our calling and flee the loneliness of our hidden life. Others depend on us - depend on our fidelity to be open channels through which the Spirit of God can benefit the entire world.

We all believe in the value of our chosen vocation but we need affirmation, sustenance and support. That need is what **Raven's Bread** tries to meet. Paul and I feel we are at the hub of a "world wide web" of hermits and solitaries. The numerous letters and emails which flow in to us express in myriad ways how much our readers appreciate this little newsletter. It has become clear that **RB** is much more than eight pages of print (and Wood B!). **Raven's Bread** is a vehicle which carries the strength, faith and prayer of all its readers to every other reader. It is a voice that says "Courage, friend!" when one of us is discouraged, and whispers "You are not alone!" when one of us feels overwhelmed.

Occasionally one of our readers asks if we are a "community" or would we consider becoming something that persons could join? How to respond? Our **RB** readership is definitely *something*, something very real and vital; something very subtle and spiritual. We fear that giving this "something" a form with definitions and (God help us!) rules is like trying to harness the Spirit. No way! But what term would adequately express the relationship that genuinely exists among our readers. Can we speak of the **Raven's Bread** family? community? fellowship? association? We are more than just a readership, surely! What might you suggest?

Recently we came across the old word "kindred." It seemed to ring another bell. Is that what we are? Are we spiritual kindred? "Kindred" is defined as "a group of related individuals" and derives from the archaic term for family relationship. Does this describe what **RB** is? An exchange among kindred souls who share insights, encouragement and prayer via the written word? Each issue thus turns into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts because we are spiritual kindred!

Let us again thank our Dominican Brothers for so generously hosting **RB** on their web

site. Where would we be without this vital web presence? Thank you, all of you, for contributing to this issue in myriad ways - reflections; renewals; responses and, most precious of all, prayer. Let us continue this prayer for one another!

**With Grateful love,  
Karen & Paul**

## **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. The volume of returns stays at a fantastic 25%!!! 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** (August 2003) features the results of the Eighth of Ten Reflection Questions: *"What limitations do you set on social relationships? Family Obligations?"*

"Some lovers of solitude have experienced considerable struggle regulating this aspect of their lives, but surprisingly, not all. Responses reveal common sense practices which reflect the freedom of the children of God rather than submission to unrealistic expectations of what a "hermit" should or should not do."

*(from editor's introduction, pg. 4 of August 2003 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 upcoming issues, we will continue to review with our readers the material received in answer to the **10 Reflection Questions**. Eventually, a complete Report will be available from **RB RESOURCES**.

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 \$5.00 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)

**If we fail to embrace our ultimate aloneness  
and seek meaning only in communion with others,  
we wither and die...**

**from The Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer**

***by: Guido Travers, Brugge, Belgium***

I have lived in solitude for more than six years. Looking at my notes from the past, I see that this search for God began long ago when I was a student. I withdrew regularly for brief trial periods of approximately a month each year. At first I was busy working full-time with the sick and elderly as well as with young people and adults. The relative fruitlessness of this work may have been due to my becoming more and more drawn to solitude, but even moreso by a deep longing for a meeting with God.

At the beginning of my hermitage life, I was joyful because a life-long heavy burden fell from my shoulders. One of the first things I noticed was that my ambitions disappeared. I did not have to achieve something or satisfy any expectations. In solitude one is oneself, nothing more or less. I experienced a wonderful sense of freedom. Occasionally streams of happiness flowed through me. Living in the present moment; whether praying or working, preparing a meal, reading, washing, or ironing, filled me with bliss - something I had seldom experienced previously. In my solitude and silence I gradually felt like a fish in the water of life.

At first I wrote my schedule on a little notice board and kept to it strictly. This drove me further and kept me from the dreaded "acedia" (boredom typical to this kind of life). Sometime ago my spiritual director urged me to let go of this strict agenda and allow myself to grow through an inner freedom given by the Spirit. So it became a new joy for me to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, even when difficult to comply with His inspiration.

The first years brought me to a tremendous self-confrontation. So many things from former days surfaced so that the pain from the past could be healed. When I confided everything to a person whom I trusted, I found great relief. Meanwhile ordeals and trials showered down upon me: frequent problems with family members, health problems, later difficulties with my accomodation, and with my spiritual director. I was driven to give everything into the hands of God.

My prayer became simpler and more authentic. I read the Holy Scriptures daily, together with the works of the "christofores" - men and women in whom the presence of Christ was pierced through the working of the Holy Spirit - these became for me as manna in the desert. They helped me to orient myself when there were no fixed landmarks. The hours of adoration became my deepest moments, when I could be wholly present to Him. I am protected from many distractions because I keep myself busy with the "bare necessities" and I feel that my prayer is just as meaningful as eating, walking, or reading. It is good to be who you are - when I realize this, my surroundings radiate peace.

Questions I am often asked by outsiders are: "Don't you often feel bored?" or "Don't you feel lonely?" A day spent in solitude is never boring. I experience feelings and events at a much deeper level than previously. My solitude has another hallmark: there is an emptiness in me that can only God can fill. I also feel more connected to people than I felt previously because their lives touch me more deeply and I have feel greater compassion in my encounters with people.

At the moment a hermit's life is "in" and is experiencing a revival throughout the whole world, but I don't think that many people can actually live it. The solitude and silence are often too devastating and too challenging to begin without any preparation. Therefore to have "enthusiasm" for this way of life is not a helpful expression - it can only be embarked upon if the trail has already been trod and the vocation given. I am convinced that one must have a calling to this way of life.

I am not, by nature, a hermit. Nor am I an introvert, or a person lacking interest in other people. Quite the contrary. But my deeper life lies in solitude and silence, so I don't think I could live any other way. What often strikes me when meeting people is that they almost immediately start talking on a very deep level - apparently they expect something from me. Their deepest hungers and desires come to the surface and mostly the conversations are very fruitful. I myself, have become more sensitive to events in my life and those of theirs. Sometimes I have felt like a shore upon which waves of aggression and misery broke and dashed upon me, threatening to shatter and break me to pieces. In the meantime my intuition has been growing, quite often I sensed some future events and this was not always pleasant.

I have never questioned myself about the fruitfulness of living this kind of life. To me it has always been clear that solitary life and silence bring about a solidarity with the larger community, just as prayer does. But recently I realized that this life has its special fruits. Over the period of a few months, five prospective hermits came to see me. They wanted to dialogue with me. I later realized it was not to hear my story, but more to recognize in my way of living their search for God and the path they were walking. My reaction to their story was apparently sufficient for them to continue to tread their difficult paths with a greater self-confidence.

And God? I have the feeling that I am still traveling toward Him; sometimes strolling, sometimes stumbling through an endless tunnel. Nor can I say that He is not here; on the contrary, His presence is the whole reason for my life and everything that I am and all that I do. He is in my song and in my silence, in my longings and in my hopes. He is present in every beat of my heart. Through Him I really live the fulness of life. All I know is that there is a deep willingness to continue along this way for years to come. To experience that this path is good and that it is my route because it has made sense of my life and because He is my God.

**Discussion Topic for November 2003 Issue:**

Do you observe/celebrate Advent?

Winter Solstice? Christmas?

Do you mark the close of the Year? How?

**Deadline: October 1, 2003**

**TREES**

"They are beautiful in their *peace*,

They are wise in their *silence*.

They will stand until we are dust.

They *teach* us, and we *tend* them."

**GALEAINIP ALTEIEM MACDUNELMOR**

**"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 Solitaires directly click on this link:[solitaries@onetel.com](mailto:solitaries@onetel.com)

To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaires click on this link:[Inner Light Productions](http://Inner Light Productions), Michael McClellan, Editor

[Thoughts-of-the-Week from the Desert Fathers](#)

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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. \$5.00**

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. \$5.00**

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. \$5.00**

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. \$5.00**

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. \$5.00**

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. \$5.00**

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 \$5.00

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 \$5.00

## Raven's Rest

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

Retreatants welcome to schedule time from now through November 1, 2003 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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### BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Solitude: A Return to the Self** by Anthony Storr. *The author, a psychotherapist, quotes fellow psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott, on the capacity to be alone: "It is probably true to say that in psycho-analytic literature more has been written on the fear of being alone or the wish to be alone than on the ability to be alone; also a considerable amount of work has been done on the withdrawn state, a defensive organization implying the expectation of persecution. It would seem to me that a discussion on the positive aspects of the capacity to be alone is overdue." The Author makes a significant contribution to that discussion by examining, from a variety of perspectives, the essential value of solitude to the development, health and creativity of the human person.* 1988. Paperback, 216 pp. The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc. 866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022/P>

**Search For Silence** by Elizabeth O'Connor. *This is an anthology offering over 100 selections from scholars, mystics, and writers. It contains exercises and meditations on confession, prayer, silence, and contemplation, full of hard-earned wisdom and deep faith.* 1986. Paperback, 187 pp. LuraMedia, 10227 Autumnview Lane, P.O. Box 261668, San Diego, CA 92126-0998

**Silence on Fire: Prayer of Awareness** by William Shannon. *The internationally known Merton scholar and author offers what **Sojourners Magazine** called: "One*

*of the best books on prayer in years." Anyone searching for a deep inner life will relish the revised and updated edition of this spiritual classic.2000. 178 pp. Paperback. \$16.95 The Crossroad Publishing Co., 370 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017*

**Websites of Interest:**

*[www.fellowshipcharitos.com](http://www.fellowshipcharitos.com)*



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