

## Where God Is Ever Found: From Cloister to Couple, a Woman's Autumn Journey

**Karen Karper Fredette**

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It's not uncommon for a woman to find love in the autumn of her life, but when that woman is a Roman Catholic nun committed to living in solitude as a hermit, and the man is a Roman Catholic priest, their story becomes a rare spiritual memoir.

Karen Karper Fredette was only seventeen—a fiery, independent redhead—when she surprised everyone by turning down a National Merit Scholarship to enter a cloistered monastery. Thirty years later, at the age of forty-seven, she surprised again—this time by leaving the monastery and moving to a ramshackle cabin in the woods of Colt Run Holler, West Virginia, to live in solitude as a modern-day hermit. And it was in this most unlikely place that the third surprise, her encounter with the Roman Catholic priest who became her husband, took place.

Through all the twists and turns of her life, the author felt the presence of her first love, God, whom she described as being closer to her than her own breath. Turning her back on that love, whether it manifested as a call to a cloistered community, an even more compelling call to the solitude of eremitic life, or its radiant and radical expression in marriage, would have been impossible for Fredette. The cloister, even with its restrictions designed to break down any self-regard, gave her deep, inner resources and the conditions that allowed for undivided focus on God. Life as a hermit built upon that foundation and added a greater sense of her own strength and resilience.

But it was in married life that Fredette blossomed most fully as a woman and gave expression to her creativity as a quilt maker, author, and communicator, ministering together with her husband and offering support to other hermits through Raven's Bread Ministries and its newsletter, *Raven's Bread: Food for Those in Solitude*.

Through it all, Fredette learned that one's relationship with God does not depend upon a religion or a church—that it is possible, even without the “stuff” society deems necessary, to have a deep and abiding sense of one's own worth.

Filled with insight and gentle humor, *Where God is Ever Found* embodies the wisdom of the ninth-century Latin hymn the Ubi Caritas, from which its title comes. The hymn begins, “Where charity and love prevail / There God is ever found; / Brought here together by Christ's love / By love are we thus bound,” and ends, “Love can exclude no race or creed / If honored be God's name; / Our common life embraces all / Whose father is the same.”

“Many are searching for the courage to cross a major threshold,” writes Fredette, “and I hope I can offer some encouraging words.” With this book, written to honor readers' requests for a continuation of the saga of hermit life that she began with *Where God Begins to Be: A Woman's Journey into Solitude* (2004), she openly and honestly lays bare the soul of a woman who, above all things, sought to live out the words of the Ubi Caritas: “Be his the glory that we seek / Be ours his holy peace.”

KRISTINE MORRIS (February 23, 2013)

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