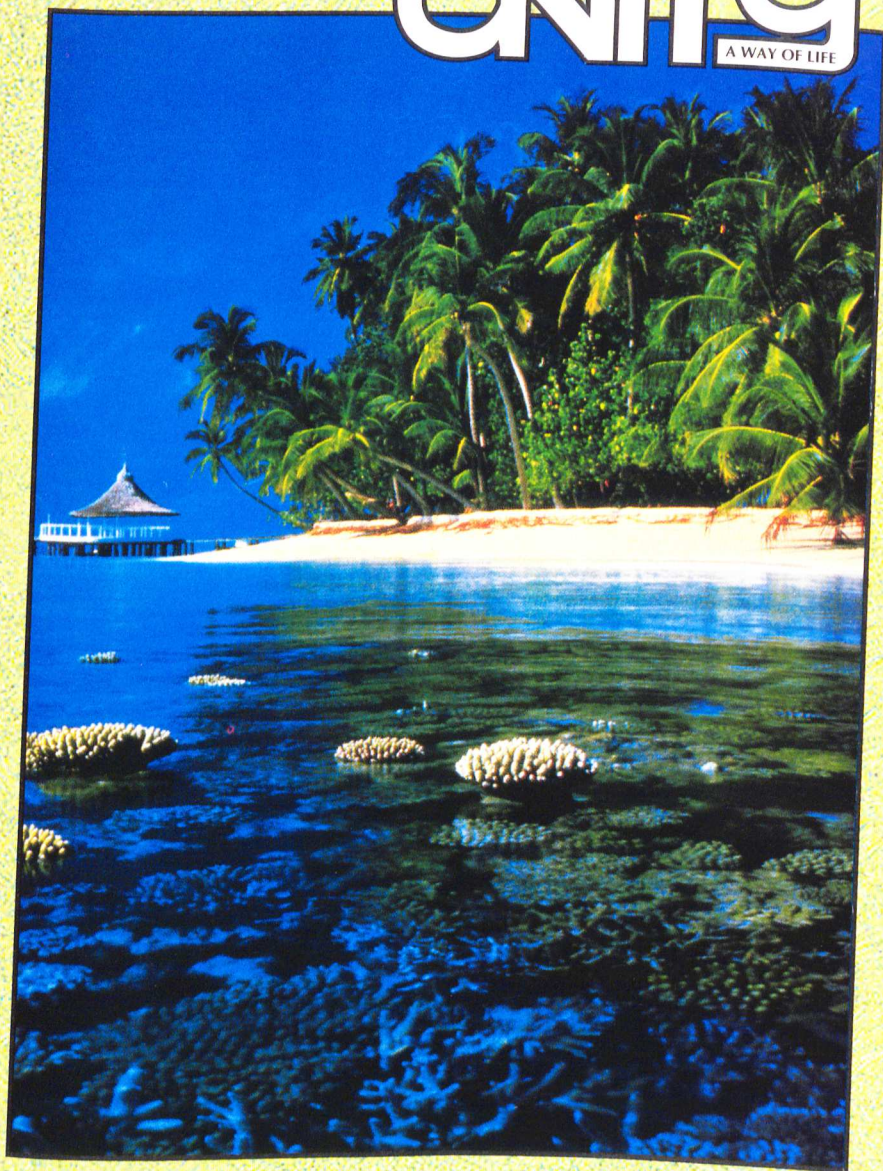


June 1993

UNITY[®]

A WAY OF LIFE



* **TRANSITION: WHAT TO DO WHEN
LIFE BECOMES A WILDERNESS**

Robert Brumet

* **CREATIVE ELDERSHIP**

* **WHEN YOUR JOB IS ELIMINATED**

* **OUR LOVE AFFAIR WITH GOD**
Eric Butterworth

* **A SIMPLE WAY**

plus: **LIFE IS A WONDER**

James Dillet Freeman

For thousands of years people have sought the "spiritual" life. Along with other religions, Christianity has spawned its ascetics and monks of many varieties. Jesus replied to the rich young man who sought eternal life, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mk. 10:21). Ever since, the desire has continued among many to find that life which authentically fulfills our relationship to God.

With this in mind, we asked Eleanor Sommer to interview two people who made the decision to find such a spiritual life for themselves. It is unique to them. It is not for everyone.

Here is their story.

A Simple Way

By Eleanor K. Sommer

LIKE MANY AMERICANS, Stefan Nadzo used to come home from work and complain about his job. He was in the middle of a promising career in the United States foreign service, but at 34, Stefan felt "stuck" and frustrated, and he did not like the looks of the future: a sedentary job, the meaningless acquisition of "stuff," and a lifetime of role-playing. He was too young to retire. So he complained, until one day something happened.

"Quit," said his wife Nancy.

"Quit?" Stefan answered incredulously at both the absurdity and simplicity of her suggestion. "And do what?" he asked.

Whatever it takes, they discovered. Their decision to change careers blossomed into an upheaval that put them on an intense, lifetime spiritual path—and in a one-room, handcrafted cabin in the Maine woods. It led to vigorous self-discovery and the examination of religious traditions from Vedanta to Islam to Jesus.

"It Had Never Occurred to Me That I Could Quit"

The final decision to make a change came in 1974 when Stefan's job took them to Iceland. Although it had not been their original intention, the Nadzos were to discover that this seemingly simple life-style change would burst open the doors to an



Dede Gilman/Visions From Nature

incredible path of spiritual seeking.

It was Nancy who first made the “spiritual” discoveries through the practice of yoga and by reading and attending classes. She slowly fed this information to Stefan, who eagerly nibbled around the edges, but found his life too complicated by the frustration and demands of his job to explore the new concepts.

“I’m not sure we knew what we were doing with our lives prior to that time in Iceland,” Stefan said several years ago during a radio interview. “I was working too hard, too long, too many days of the week, smoking too much, and Nancy and I were not getting the time together that we needed,” he said. Stefan also noticed that he did not desire the roles of his superiors or the possessions they had accumulated along the way.

“I already had a smaller version of their lives—I had a small Volvo, they had a big Mercedes—and I didn’t particularly like or respect where they were or who they were.”

But until Nancy’s sincere suggestion, “It had never occurred to me that I could quit. Oh, sure I had said it several times, but

I never thought I *genuinely* had the alternative to quit,” Stefan recalled.

Whenever Stefan tells this story, someone will approach him and thank him for pointing out the obvious. As in his own case, sometimes it takes someone else to point out the exit.

The Challenges of Letting Go

For the first eighteen years following their resignation from the foreign service, the Nadzos lived a mostly solitary life in a cabin on a dead-end road in Franklin, a small town in eastern Maine.

“We simply let go. We sold or otherwise released all kinds of things that were no longer relevant: our friends from the pre-Maine days, our “city” clothes, our twelve-place table settings, crystal glasses, silver trays, dozens of letters, home movies, memorabilia, and so on.

“Thus from the outset, we have been emptying, but never in a stoic grit-your-teeth-and-bear-it kind of way. As we see it, what might be appropriate for some can breed anger and resentment toward God for others. Jesus taught us to ‘resist not evil’ (Mt. 5:39 KJV). In this context, we take that to mean don’t fight with yourself and your life and the things you are trying to give up; just let them go, and eventually they will go away of their own accord.”

It was not easy, the Nadzos recalled. “But neither was it a terrible ordeal because it was part of the program to which we were committed.”

There were the hardships of the land—the Nadzos had no modern facilities, grew their own vegetables, and basically lived in a large one-room cabin that they built themselves. They came to the woods with no pioneer skills, and Stefan often jokes in all sincerity that he thought “a chain saw was a device for cutting chains.”

“There were moments when we were terrified. We’d look at each other and say, ‘This is madness.’” And although they had promised each other that they would never again take regular nine-to-five jobs, they worked at whatever jobs they could find when they needed money. Stefan successfully marketed Nancy’s artwork which provided them income during their early days in Maine. And in turn when Stefan began having speaking engagements, Nancy found herself booking his schedule.

Their neighbors, they learned later, had started a pool to see how long the "out-of-staters" would last in the woods. Luckily, they all lost.

The story of the Nadzos' homesteading can be enjoyed in one of their books *The Cranberry Tales*, an allegory about the Wensleydales, a husband and wife who move to the country. It is a charming story told through the eyes of some of their animals including two cats, a dog, and a rooster.

But many of the hurdles were psychological in nature. For example, it took nearly five years for Stefan to feel comfortable traveling into Bar Harbor where he might run into old acquaintances from their government service days.

"There I would be in my jeans and T-shirt, and I was afraid they would say, 'Look at Stefan Nadzo. He's living in the woods like some kind of hippie.' After all that time, I was still afraid to be exposed—to the world."

Making a Contract With God

The Nadzos have developed a habit of approaching God head-on. They emphasize a candid, open, truthful, ongoing dialogue with God. When you embark on a spiritual path, you should not pussyfoot around, according to the Nadzos. Make a plan. Set your goals. Be clear. Be straightforward about what you expect. They even suggest a written contract between you and God.

"Write it down. Be committed to it. You have got to say to yourself, 'This is what I want more than anything else in my life.' And you have to remember it every day. That is the indispensable key," they said. This approach is the same for anything you wish to accomplish. The difference is, in their opinion, once you make this commitment with God, you have a partner in achieving that goal.

"Tell God that you expect guidance in doing whatever is necessary to assist, encourage, and nourish you in accomplishing your goal. Tell God that you expect to be kept informed, to have teachers sent to you to do their part in this bargain," Stefan said.

"God expects to be talked to this way," Stefan said.

"God is infinitely benevolent," he said. "The forces of the universe are geared to facilitate our journey along this path; poised to spring into action.... Despite the appearances, and they can be disquieting, the odds are heavily in our favor

because what we seek is in the ground on which we stand and it is wherever we are; while we may have far to go, we have not far to look.

"Seek and you shall find, we have been taught; if that is true about anything, it must be true about everything: ... whatever you seek, you will find. And, conversely, whatever you find you can be sure you were seeking, whether or not you realized you were," wrote Stefan in *Take Off Your Shoes*. And even if you seek material goals with that conviction, you will find them, if that is what you want.

Find the Source, All Else Will Follow

The Nadzos are committed to a life instilled with love and Truth. They seek every opportunity to be free of distractions in their search for union with God.

"If one wishes to find out what one truly is, then one literally puts one's attention on one's source, God, and all else will follow. There is no compromising on this. If one's attention is divided, one is divided. It is that simple and that hard," Nancy explains.

Since their retreat to the Maine woods, the Nadzos—who prefer to think of themselves as one unit: "Stefan-and-Nancy is one word," according to them—have undertaken the exploration and study of just about every spiritual path available.

They have sought to distill and crystallize the salient points that all religions have in common: Truth and love.

Their prescription for spiritual awareness is based on simplicity. "By the spiritual path or the spiritual undertaking, we mean something intensely practical. If it can't be used in your daily life, as far as we're concerned, it is useless," Stefan said.

What have they discovered after twenty years of searching, studying, praying, and contemplating? That all authentic paths ultimately offer the same result: realization of oneness with God. That you may call God by any name you wish and still have the privilege of that "ultimate" ear. That fear need

"If one wishes to find out what one truly is, then one literally puts one's attention on one's source, God, and all else will follow."

not be part of our lives. That peace of mind can be achieved simply and directly.

Living Your Life Contract With God

"You can live the rest of your life in the context of the spiritual goals that you set for yourself—that contract that you make with God. If you are a bus driver, you can say I am a bus driver seeking this. Or if you are a housewife: I am a housewife seeking this.

"You don't have to change your life, just the framework in which you live it. So when you go to work, you look at your employees or employer or your job in the context of this statement. How does what is going on in my daily life address this contract? Since my contract promised that I would be sent teachers and guides and nourishment, what is it about this parking ticket that is a lesson? What can I learn from this illness?" Nancy said.

"And when you begin to *live* your life contract with God, you are going to begin to feel better and some of your fear will begin to dissolve," Stefan said. It's not a panacea. "You are still going to get sick, and people are still going to take your parking place, but when things happen, they will disturb you less," he said.

Look for quiet time. Meditate, pray, or just sit quietly—whatever is best for you. It is part of getting to know who you are, an essential element in getting to know God, according to the Nadzos.

"Fifteen minutes twice a day is all that it takes," Stefan said, declaring that although that sounds like nothing, it is indeed one of the most difficult undertakings. He speaks from experience. "You won't do it. You won't do it for the first three years. We'll never miss "MacGyver," but we just can't find those fifteen minutes."

But find them, he urges. "It's an indication to the other party in the contract (God) that you are serious."

As Stefan told a gathering at Unity Church in Naples, Florida, several years ago, anyone can seek this truth, under any circumstances. "If *we* can do it, anyone can. There is nothing special about me, and there is nothing special about Nancy. Neither of us was born in India. Neither of us has ever *been* to India. Neither of us has ever been to the Holy Land. I do not know how to sit in the lotus position.

"From our home in the woods, we have studied and practiced and looked for and treaded on virtually every spiritual path there is from astrology through Zen. And we discovered at the base of it, the center, the nub of it, the kernel of truth that is the same in every single one: It is that we are free. We only need to know and remember that."

This Way Is Not the Only Way

"To seek a life filled with God, it is not necessary to renounce the world, build your own home, and grow your own food," Nancy said. "This way is not the only way. What is important is the driving desire to make the changes you need to make. Until you want to do this change as much as you want to breathe, you will not succeed."

It's the desire, not the circumstances, that brings you closer to God. So seeking and including God in your life can be done in your own home, with children dragging their toys through the living room, the dog shaking its fleas on the carpet, and your spouse asking for attention. It can be done in your office cubicle or on the assembly line. Admittedly, the more distractions there are the more difficulty you will have, but Nancy and Stefan suggest looking for God in all aspects of your life.

It is not magical or mysterious. It is pointed and focused. Nancy quotes the Gita on this subject, "Give thy mind to me" as easily as she quotes Jesus, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Lk. 12:34).

In 1990 the Nadzos finally built a "real" house on their land in Maine, but they still enjoy the simple life that they have lived for the past twenty years. To some, the Nadzos' life appears picturesque, sublime, and intriguing. To others, it seems scary and difficult. According to Nancy, it is all of these.

"Our life is now blissful, peaceful, flowing, and surrendered. There are times, however, when old habits flare up and disturb the peace, but they do not last long, and we are both aware of who is acting and why. It is rather like watching a drama unfold. It does not bind us in any way anymore. We do not dramatize our habits as we did early on. We are considerably detached. We do not have ambitions or many needs," Nancy explained.

"We have dedicated ourselves to what we call the contemplative life, and we consider ourselves monks. We are attached to no religion and no particular group except Truth.

We sought Truth, and we have found it. We have discovered what we believe—what we know—to be some of the real secrets of the universe, and they are so blatantly simple and obvious and free and practical that it is almost laughable,” Stefan has said.

Although the path they have chosen is not for everyone, they feel that the knowledge they have gained on this journey is for everyone. And that is what they delight in sharing through discussion, tapes, and a half-dozen books.

A Journey Shared With Others


Over the years the Nadzos have shared their journey with others. They have spoken at many Unity churches throughout the country, including the Chapel at Unity Village, and have for the past ten years been regular guest speakers at Unity of Naples in Florida.

Their life has been filled with simplicity, and the more they have released, the deeper their spiritual path has become. Their search for Truth and union with God has had twists, turns, and ups and downs too numerous to mention. As a result, they have produced a handful of insightful books that are available at many Unity bookstores. Or you can write to them in Franklin, ME 04634. The town only has 180 people; your letter will surely reach them.

How much simpler can it get?

As simple as the lilies in the field, one of Stefan and Nancy’s favorite teachings of Jesus. “How *do* those lilies grow?” Stefan often asks those gathered to share his words.

“They don’t do any planning. They don’t connive against each other to see who gets more room. They don’t compare blossoms. They don’t worry if it doesn’t rain. They don’t write letters to their senators if there is an early freeze. If it freezes and they die, they die. And if it rains in the spring, they grow. They know that whatever is appropriate will happen when it is appropriate, and they respond accordingly.

“And that is what Jesus meant. Live like the lilies. Just live your life and have faith that you are planted in fertile ground and that your life will grow appropriately if you allow yourself to be yourself. Let go and don’t be afraid.” 

Eleanor K. Sommer is a free-lance editor and writer and a publishing consultant. She lives in Naples, Florida, where she publishes a newsletter called *Florida Naturally*.