**Colette Lafia**

***Seeking Surrender: How a Trappist Monk
Taught Me to Trust and Embrace Life
(Ave Maria Press, April 2015)***

**Q & A**

1. **Q: Your book includes excerpts from letters you exchanged with a Trappist monk from the Abbey of Gethsemani for over five years. What drew you to the monastery in the first place and how did you meet Brother René?**

Lafia: During an especially difficult time in my life, a good friend of mine who had visited the Abbey of Gethsemani many times suggested that my husband and I get away for a while and visit the monastery. We were struggling with infertility, with my husband’s business challenges, and with the recent death of my sister from cancer. On the first day of our visit, I met Brother René at the hospitality desk. At one point, I spontaneously asked him if he was ever lonely. That question, and his subsequent reply, was the beginning of our unexpected friendship.

1. **Q: What inspired you to start writing to Brother René, and why did you choose to write letters rather than emails?**

Lafia: Brother René and I seemed to form an immediate bond, and when I returned home I decided to stay in touch with him. I wrote a letter to the Abbey of Gethsemani, addressed to him, not knowing what to expect in return. A week later, I received a handwritten letter from him, and that’s how our correspondence began. Brother René always wrote by hand, while I typed my letters. Writing letters gave our correspondence a very human touch as well as the necessary interval of time in-between each letter to consider the questions posed and our responses.

1. **Q: How did you grow and change as a result of your friendship with Brother René?**

Lafia: Brother René had absolute confidence in God and in the power of love. He was a mirror reflecting faith and trust during a period of great darkness and loss in my life. Over time, with the help of Brother René’s wisdom, I understood I was on the path of surrender. I just needed to have faith in it, embrace it, and learn how to live it. His friendship was so important to my growth. I believe that spiritual companionship is such an essential part of our spiritual journey. We need each other!

1. **Q: The monastic life is very different from the way most of us live. What do you think the monastic tradition has to teach us today?**

Lafia: I think the value the monastic tradition places on silence is especially important for us, today. We live with constant stimulation and noise, from our cell phone, emails, television, news, and the voice in our own heads telling us all we have to do each day. Silence is important for our wellbeing. It calms us down. It helps us hear the Divine in our hearts, as well as get to know ourselves more deeply. I have a simple daily practice that helps me. In the car as I drive to work, I don’t talk on the phone or listen to music. I drive in silence, and I love it. It settles me down before the busy day begins.

1. **Q: Many people think of surrender as resignation, as either giving up or giving their power away. How is your view of surrender different?**

Lafia: I see surrender as something active, not passive. Surrender is not about shrugging your shoulders and feeling defeated. It’s about stepping through that threshold into uncharted waters, and choosing to trust life. It’s letting life be the mystery that it really is and embracing it—learning how to live in the fullness of life. As I say in my book, surrender is about learning to be the receiver of life, rather than trying to control life.

1. **Q: In the book, you say, “Surrender is a grace we open to receiving, as well as being a practice.” Could you explain what you mean by that?**

Lafia: Based upon my experience, I’ve come to believe that surrender finds us. That’s why it’s a grace—it comes to us, usually when we feel we’ve reached the end of the road and have nowhere else to turn. Yet, it also becomes a daily practice, one that we cultivate through our actions, our thoughts, and what we hold in our hearts. It’s a living, breathing, dynamic force.

1. **Q: In *Seeking Surrender* you talk about surrender as an intrinsic part of our everyday life, yet we usually think of surrender as a specific response to a situation. Can you say more about your concept of surrender as a “daily encounter,” as you put it?**

Lafia: Every day, I am being asked to live in surrender. I find that I can surrender into my day, into my relationships, into my work, and into how I feel, or I can spend my day in resistance, holding back and wanting things to be different. I can surrender into my marriage and appreciate my spouse for his gifts, or I can keep trying to change certain habits of his that I wish I could change. Even when I’m in a grocery store line, I can surrender and relax, or become agitated and impatient. Every moment is an opportunity to choose surrender.

1. **Q: When living a life of surrender, what are the challenges that people face and how might they address and overcome them?**

Lafia: Let’s remember that we don’t just arrive at a perfect state of surrender and that’s it. It’s a conversation with life—a constant dialogue between surrender and resistance. That’s challenging for all of us. We want to get over our problems. We want to triumph, move on, and we do, but there’s always more. Surrender isn’t about overcoming problems, but about our relationship to what’s happening in our lives, and trusting that the Divine will carry us. Meeting resistance and releasing it is part of living surrender.

1. **Q: In your book, you write about how surrender allowed you to move from grief to grace. Can you tell us about that?**

Lafia: When I arrived at the door of surrender, I was in a deep state of grief. I was drenched in loss, and I wanted to run and hide. It was in this complete state of vulnerability that the grace of surrender entered my heart. As I followed the path of surrender, the grief slowly transformed into living with more trust and acceptance, and grace deepened in me.

1. **Q: In the book, you end up finding peace with some difficult issues like infertility, insomnia, and caring for your father during his final years. How did writing this book become part of your healing process?**

Lafia: When I started writing, I couldn’t believe I was even addressing this theme. It’s so big! It’s like touching the heart of life. I felt I knew nothing about it, yet it was something I was living. I have struggled and continue to struggle with living a surrendered life, but the book keeps teaching me how to do it. Every day, I meet some degree of resistance, and yet I now know how to practice surrender, to release, let go, and yield; to call out like the monks, “O Lord, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me.” They say that you write what you most need to learn, and in this case, it definitely was true.

**Colette Lafia** is the author of***Seeking Surrender****: How my Friendship with a Trappist Monk Taught me to Trust and Embrace Life* and ***Comfort and Joy****: Simple Ways to Care for Ourselves and Others*, which was named one of the best spiritual books of 2008 by Spirituality and Practice. A San Francisco-based spiritual director, educator, and part-time children’s librarian, Colette has led spiritual and self-care workshops for many organizations and groups, including the Archdioceses of San Francisco, Mercy Center, the Institute for Health and Healing, and the San Francisco Unified School District.

**Colette is passionate about awakening people to the love of the Divine and helping them connect more deeply with the presence of the sacred in their daily lives.** To contact Colette, learn more about her offerings, and find out how she can work with you or your group, please visit her website at [www.ColetteLafia.com](http://www.ColetteLafia.com).

 *Seeking Surrender:**How my Friendship with a Trappist
Monk Taught Me to Trust and Embrace Life*

**“In**[***Seeking Surrender*,**](http://www.amazon.com/Seeking-Surrender-Friendship-Trappist-Embrace/dp/193349588X) **Colette Lafia chal-lenges our notion of surrender, inviting us to see it as a path of opening to the fullness of life. Her spiritual companion, a Trappist Monk from the Abbey of Gethsemani, encourages and guides her towards deeper trust along her journey in a series of letters shared over years. A beautiful and honest book.” —*Fr. Richard Rohr, O.F.M.***

Colette Lafia's palpable openness and warm storytelling lead readers through the same compassionate process that led the author to accept herself, find peace with life, and strive for an ever-deepening relationship with God.

 Readers will find simple exercises and profound advice for living a more conscious and intentional life, ultimately discovering a new attitude of acceptance and letting go.