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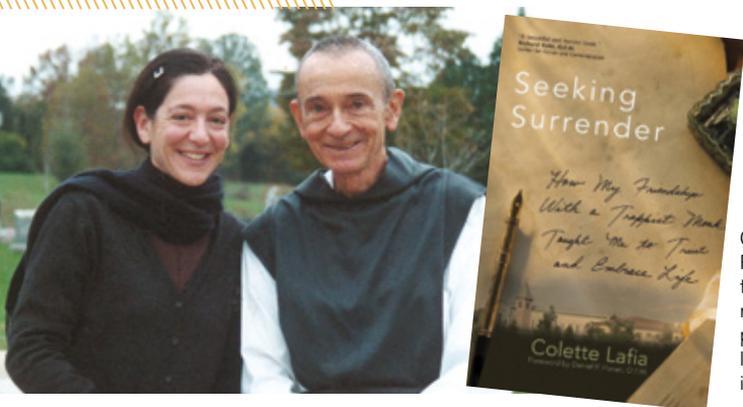
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Colette Lafia first met Brother René in 2002 during a retreat to the Abbey of Gethsemani monastery. The two became pen pals for years, forging a long-lasting friendship rooted in spirituality

SEEKING SURRENDER

Author Colette Lafia tells us how the one thing we're missing is what we've spent our whole lives trying to avoid: surrender Written By Amanda Storey

Many of us think of the act of surrender as giving ourselves up to something negative — letting the enemy win. But according to Colette Lafia, a San Francisco-based writer, spiritual director, blogger and part-time librarian, it's the opposite.

"I see surrender as something active, not passive," says Lafia, who just released her second book, *Seeking Surrender: How My Friendship with a Trappist Monk Taught Me to Trust and Embrace Life*, this spring. "Surrender is not about shrugging your shoulders and feeling defeated. It's about learning to be the receiver of life, rather than trying to control life."

Even chatting with her through email, Lafia emanates zen. But she's had a lot of practice with written words — in fact, her spiritual journey of surrender began with a pen pal.

His name was Brother René. Lafia first met him in 2002 when she and her husband trekked out to the Abbey of Gethsemani, where they'd been advised to stay for a while after weathering a very challenging season of their lives. Lafia had been struggling with the death of her sister from cancer, her husband's business challenges and infertility, and

following a friend's suggestion, the couple set out for the monastery. Brother René was working at the hospitality desk when they arrived.

"At one point, I spontaneously asked him if he was ever lonely," recalls Lafia. "That question, and his subsequent reply, was the beginning of our unlikely friendship."

The trip to the Abbey of Gethsemani had been a turning point for Lafia. Once she and her husband returned home, she decided to keep in touch with Brother René, with whom she'd sparked an instant friendship. She typed out a letter and mailed it to the monastery, not sure of what to expect in return. A week later she received his handwritten response — and the rest is history.

Lafia and Brother René continued their conversation for years, always via letters. The friendship allowed Lafia to come to realize there was a spiritual aspect to the acceptance she needed in her life, which was called "surrender."

"Over time, with the help of Brother René's wisdom, I understood I was on the path of surrender," says the author. "I just needed to have faith in it, embrace it and learn how to live it."

This was no easy task. Human

instincts have us in a constant debate between fight and flight, so to accept a completely alternate option — to surrender — may seem impossible at first. But like all important skills, raising this white flag takes patience and practice.

The inability to surrender is a downfall that just about every North American adult is subject to, and that's why Lafia created *Seeking Surrender* — to help free those of us who are locked in our phones, in our workdays, in our long lists of setbacks.

"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," says Lafia. "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."

It may sound like a scary science, perhaps too big for the average spirit to swallow, but Lafia's story speaks a language that will resonate with any reader. Lafia has filled every page with mind-blowing advice that will flip perspectives like a light switch, all extracted from her own learnings and experiences.

The interesting thing about *Seeking Surrender* is that in the five years Lafia took to compose it, she was discovering surrender herself. The lessons taught in the book, she says, weren't things she'd already known and then decided to write about. The act of writing the book was part of her journey towards surrender — which is why the contents feel so real, human and relatable to readers. It's like Lafia is both the student and the teacher, learning with the reader as they flip each page.

"They say that you write what you need to learn, and in this case, it was definitely true," says Lafia, who's considering writing a third book about tapping into the immense subject of love. "Now I know how to practise surrender — to release, let go and yield."

www.colettelifafia.com