

the Mendicant

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

◀ GROWTH IN A TIME OF CHANGE ▶

2004–2024

VANESSA GUERIN

The best way out is always through.

—Robert Frost

I can't believe that it's been twenty years since I was invited to join the small CAC staff. There were twelve of us then, accomplishing a large amount of work with the support of work interns and volunteers. Today, there are almost fifty gifted and carefully vetted staff members; the history of the CAC Internship Program is tucked away in the archives; and the many faithful volunteers I once managed have not been needed to support CAC's many mailing projects and events since before the onset of the pandemic.

We've been through a lot of changes and transitions in the past several years, including Fr. Richard retiring from his central position as founder and animator of the CAC, in addition to stepping aside as Dean of the Living School. New programs have been introduced, and most members of the staff now work remotely. I doubt that the early staff members, work interns, and volunteers would even recognize the CAC today.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience these many changes and transitions. I was initially hired as the volunteer coordinator. Within the year, I began facilitating events and eventually became the editor of *Radical Grace*,



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the CAC's first publication—three separate, yet simultaneous, positions. In the early days, nothing seemed daunting. The work was all indeed radical grace.

We were publishing extraordinary authors in that initial humble publication, which we referred to as *RG*—a publication that Fr. Richard initiated the year the CAC was launched, over thirty-five years ago. Because of the high level and quality of writing, *Radical Grace* eventually birthed two successor publications: *Oneing*, the CAC's biannual literary journal; and *the Mendicant*, CAC's development newsletter. Additionally, I managed the editorial process for numerous books through CAC Publishing and three external publishers of Richard Rohr's works. I had the good fortune to do much of this in collaboration with my stellar assistant editor, Shirin McArthur, and gifted designer, Nelson Kane.

By the time you read this, I will have moved through and out of the CAC's always "open door" to new adventures, following a long period of discernment and strong tugs by the Hound of Heaven. I am leaving my beloved work in fine hands. Although I will miss the CAC dearly, I carry many wonderful and challenging memories through what I like to call French doors.

Indeed, "The best way out is always through."

Embracing Transformation:

A Journey into Single Motherhood

Becoming a single mom marked a profound transition in my life, bringing with it a wave of challenges and opportunities for growth. While the path ahead seemed daunting, I chose to embrace this change with resilience and optimism, firmly believing that it would lead to personal transformation.

The initial days were undoubtedly challenging, as I navigated the complexities of solo parenting. The absence of a partner meant shouldering responsibilities traditionally shared, from managing finances to making important decisions. It was a steep learning curve, requiring adaptability and a newfound sense of independence. While the adjustment was not without its difficulties, I recognized that each obstacle presented an opportunity for personal and emotional growth.



“The experience of being a single mom became a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the resilience that surfaces in the face of adversity.”

Trust became a crucial element in this journey: Trust in my own capabilities as a mother, trust in the support systems available, and trust that this change was an essential catalyst for personal transformation. Instead of viewing single motherhood as a limitation, I chose to see it as an invitation to rediscover my strengths and forge a stronger connection with my children.

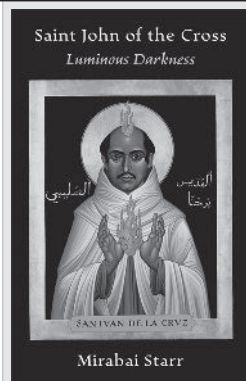
The process of growth unfolded gradually but noticeably. I honed my organizational skills, becoming adept at balancing work, parenting, and self-care. The challenges I faced forced me to confront insecurities and fears, fostering a resilience that I never knew existed within me. Through this process, I discovered an unwavering strength that was empowering.

One of the most significant transformations occurred in my perspective on relationships. While the end of a partnership was undoubtedly painful, it also became an opportunity to reassess what I valued in relationships and to establish healthier boundaries. This newfound clarity paved the way for personal growth, as I learned to prioritize self-love and self-care.

As time passed, the bond between my children and me deepened, fostering a relationship built on open communication and mutual understanding. The experience of being a single mom became a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the resilience that surfaces in the face of adversity.

My transition to single motherhood has been a journey of growth and transformation. By embracing change, trusting in my abilities, and viewing challenges as opportunities, I have emerged stronger, more resilient, and with a deeper understanding of myself. Single motherhood, rather than limiting my potential, has become the catalyst for a profound and positive evolution in my life.

Ashanti Rouse holds a wealth of experience in designing and implementing innovative online learning experiences, playing a pivotal role in fostering a culture of continuous learning among learners. Her strategic approach involves leveraging cutting-edge technologies and pedagogical methods to create dynamic and engaging online learning environments. Beyond her role as CAC's Online Education Manager, she enjoys spending time with her kids and going on vacations in the Caribbean.



Saint John of the Cross: Luminous Darkness

In this compendium of translations and commentary on the writings of the 16th-century mystic St. John of the Cross, interspiritual teacher, author, and translator Mirabai Starr invites readers to experience his “quintessential guidance for navigating the journey to union with Love Itself” that first drew her to the sublime poetry of this Spanish mystic. This revised and updated edition includes a new foreword by James Finley, who notes “how skillfully Mirabai has woven the poems together with tracings of valuable information and insights to help us understand how his poems, his life, and our lives are so mysteriously interconnected and sustained in God’s love.” Available at store.cac.org

The Gift of Resilience in Times of Change

When I was in ninth grade, my family moved to France, outside Geneva, Switzerland. Dad took a job as pastor of an English-speaking expatriate church for international diplomat types, and I attended a French public school nearby. At the time, I resisted the change, missed my Michigan high school friends, and became very depressed. Many years later, though, I'm grateful for the exposure to diverse places, cultures, and perspectives that I never would have otherwise had—from discovering fondue to meeting inspiring global leaders. My cross-cultural experiences, I'm convinced, prepared me for the resilient work of true spirituality: navigating continual growth in times of constant change.

Much has been changing at the CAC. Richard Rohr has formally handed the teaching and programmatic baton to the CAC faculty and organization. In the Daily Meditations, we've continued featuring the work of Brian McLaren, Barbara Holmes, and James Finley alongside Richard's beloved reflections. Each week, we also share excerpts from a wide range of authors located in the broader Christian contemplative movement. We transitioned from highlighting Richard's individual voice to using an editorial-team voice to introduce each meditation. Amid all this change, thanks to the trust and dedication of our readers, the Daily Meditations keep going, and our community keeps growing together—even when Richard himself is not personally involved.

As a part of Richard's stepping back, CAC Dean of Faculty Brian McLaren has stepped forward. Brian's books, ministry, and presence—embodying what Richard describes as “broad and deep wisdom”—mirror the spirit of Richard's foundational commitment to contemplation and action. To begin developing a Daily Meditations theme for the new year, we met with Brian and dialogued about how the “DMs” can be most helpful to people in a world “on fire” with manifold crises and constant change. We then named the need for “Radical Resilience”—our theme

for 2024—to form a durable, contemplative consciousness in such times.

Growing through change, of course, does not mean denial of what is difficult—it took me quite a while to accept my overseas move as a teen—but rather, a commitment to trusting God with the ever-fluctuating future. In this issue, longtime CAC Publications Editor Vanessa Guerin shares



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her transition news that she is moving on from CAC after twenty years. I’m grateful for her tremendous contribution to CAC’s publications, from editing the old magazine *Radical Grace* to creating CAC’s journal *Oneing*. I’m sad to see her go. At the same time, Vanessa is bound for new adventures as growth and change carry on. I’ll be stepping into a new role to oversee both print and digital publications. Vanessa’s shoes surely run a size difficult-to-fill, but I’m eager to embrace the unknown future with resilience and trust.

Mark Longhurst edited Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations for four years and is now the CAC’s new Print and Digital Publications Manager. A graduate of the inaugural 2015 Living School cohort and the author of the forthcoming book The Holy Ordinary: A Way to God (Monkfish Publishing, October 2024), he writes regularly at marklonghurst.substack.com.

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Woundedness and Change

This last fall, I sat in a home I had never been in, looking across the dinner table into the eyes of a man who looks just like me. It was like looking at a version of myself. Me staring at him, him staring back at me. Our eyes telling one another the wordless stories of missed decades.

I can count on one hand the number of times I have seen my biological father since I was a young child: three, to be exact. Numbers are easy to remember when they are that small.

My life has been marked by his absence.

Growing up, a suburban life—a golden retriever in the backyard and my subtle attempts to hide behind a different last name—masked the negative space that was him. In the quietness of my own heart, the effects of his absence were like strings on a puppet, continually yanking at the corners of my life.

Across the dinner table that day, he looked at me and said, “I didn’t abandon you,” then paused as if reconsidering. “I never meant to abandon you....”

He spoke my wounding back to me, and it was as if time slowed down. I was acutely aware that I was bearing witness to one of my own canon events.

Some changes occur subtly and gradually. Some changes are cataclysmic, like the culmination of decades of longing and slow work that crescendo in a sudden shift. My father’s words were ones I had danced around for years, loaded with meaning and fraught with history. They were words that I so desperately needed to hear and did not know how to receive.

Sometimes change pushes you into unknown territory. One minute you are driving down a well-worn road

you have traveled a million times before, but instead of being on autopilot you feel a sort of amnesia, an untethering, like you can no longer place yourself in the world.

Suddenly, it is all new—or maybe you are new.



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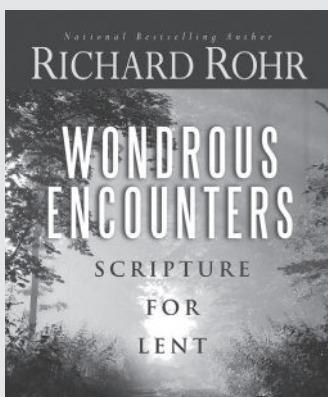
I’ve spent my life resistant to this change, the change of healing.

Do I even know who I am without this woundedness?

In this season, change is inviting me to cease clinging to my woundedness and instead let my woundedness slowly bleed out. This is not a loss of self, but an invitation to bring the essence of myself to the table in a more integrated, more healed, more whole way.

This is the journey. This is my practice.

Jennifer Tompos is the CAC’s Living School Program Manager. She has a background in theological studies and spiritual formation and is an avid reader. Jennifer lives in Oregon with her husband and three young children.



Wondrous Encounters: Scripture for Lent

Wondrous Encounters is Richard Rohr’s collection of meditations for Lent. Their intent is nothing less than a transformation into our original “image and likeness,” which is the very image of God. What always and finally matters for all of us is encounter.

He begins each meditation with a single title or phrase that sums up the point. Then he offers the meditation followed by key passages from the readings. He ends each meditation with a Starter Prayer that invites you to self-disclosure and to enter the wondrous divine dialogue with clarity, insight—and holy desire!

Wondrous Encounters is not linked to a specific lectionary cycle and may be used each Lenten season. Available at store.cac.org

In Appreciation of Vanessa Guerin,

Managing Editor of *the Mendicant*

CAC staff member Paul Swanson started a staff meeting recently with a reflection about the dynamic tension between being an amateur and being a professional when working on something we deeply care about. The word “amateur” originated from the French and Italian in the eighteenth century to mean “one who loves” or “one who is devoted.” The amateur devotes themselves to an activity or a craft, not because they have to do it, but because they want to do it and feel called to do it. The amateur embodies passion, joy, freedom, and a community mindset. The amateur says, “I love what I do, whether I am paid for it or not.”

On the other hand, the professional has expectations of performance and results. They are exemplified by the drive for excellence and devote themselves to an activity with expertise and proficiency. The professional embodies the confidence, speed, and effectiveness that come from experience and mastery. The professional can say, “I’m proud of the job I do and the contribution I make to the mission and the team.”

As you will read in her wonderful reflection, Vanessa Guerin, the Managing Editor of *the Mendicant* and longest-serving member of CAC’s team, is moving through the “open door” to new adventures after twenty years of service. Vanessa joined the team when it was far smaller and more volunteer-driven than it is today. Vanessa loves to remind us that when she started at CAC, everyone on the staff made the same wage, “And it was \$13.64 per hour!” That small but mighty team accomplished an enormous amount, with everyone holding one, two, three, or sometimes even more functional responsibilities at the same time. So many of the opportunities that CAC has today were made possible by

the foundation built by Vanessa and this committed and passionate team.

Vanessa has been a key part of the growth of CAC’s impact through many transitions these past few years, including the launch of our CONSPIRE conference series, the



expansion of CAC’s programs, the development of CAC Publications and the literary journal *Oneing*, and much more. There are many of us, myself included, who will need to step into new areas of responsibility in light of Vanessa’s transition.

By stepping back from his active leadership duties last year, Fr. Richard showed us that this mission and work are not dependent on any one person, even the founder.

Otherwise, it can’t be sustainable and impactful for future generations. At the same time, while we are not dependent on any one individual, all individuals play profound roles.

In that spirit, I want to thank and appreciate Vanessa for all that she has done for this organization and community. She represents the best of the

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dynamic tension that Paul Swanson describes:

Someone who works with the spirit and love of an amateur and the commitment and responsibility of a professional. One might even call this . . . the responsibility of love.

Love and blessings to you and your next adventure, Vanessa!

Ben Keesey
Director of Development and Strategic Partnerships



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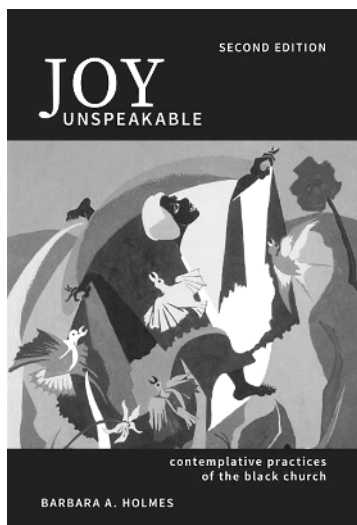
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JOY UNSPEAKABLE: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church

Joy Unspeakable focuses on the aspects of the Black church that point beyond particular congregational gatherings toward a mystical and communal spirituality not within the exclusive domain of any denomination. This mystical aspect of the Black church is deeply implicated in the well-being of African American people but is not the focus of their intentional reflection. Barbara Holmes' research in this book—through oral histories, church records, and written accounts—details not only ways in which contemplative experience is built into African American collective worship but also the legacy of African monasticism, a history of spiritual exemplars, and unique meditative worship practices. Available at store.cac.org