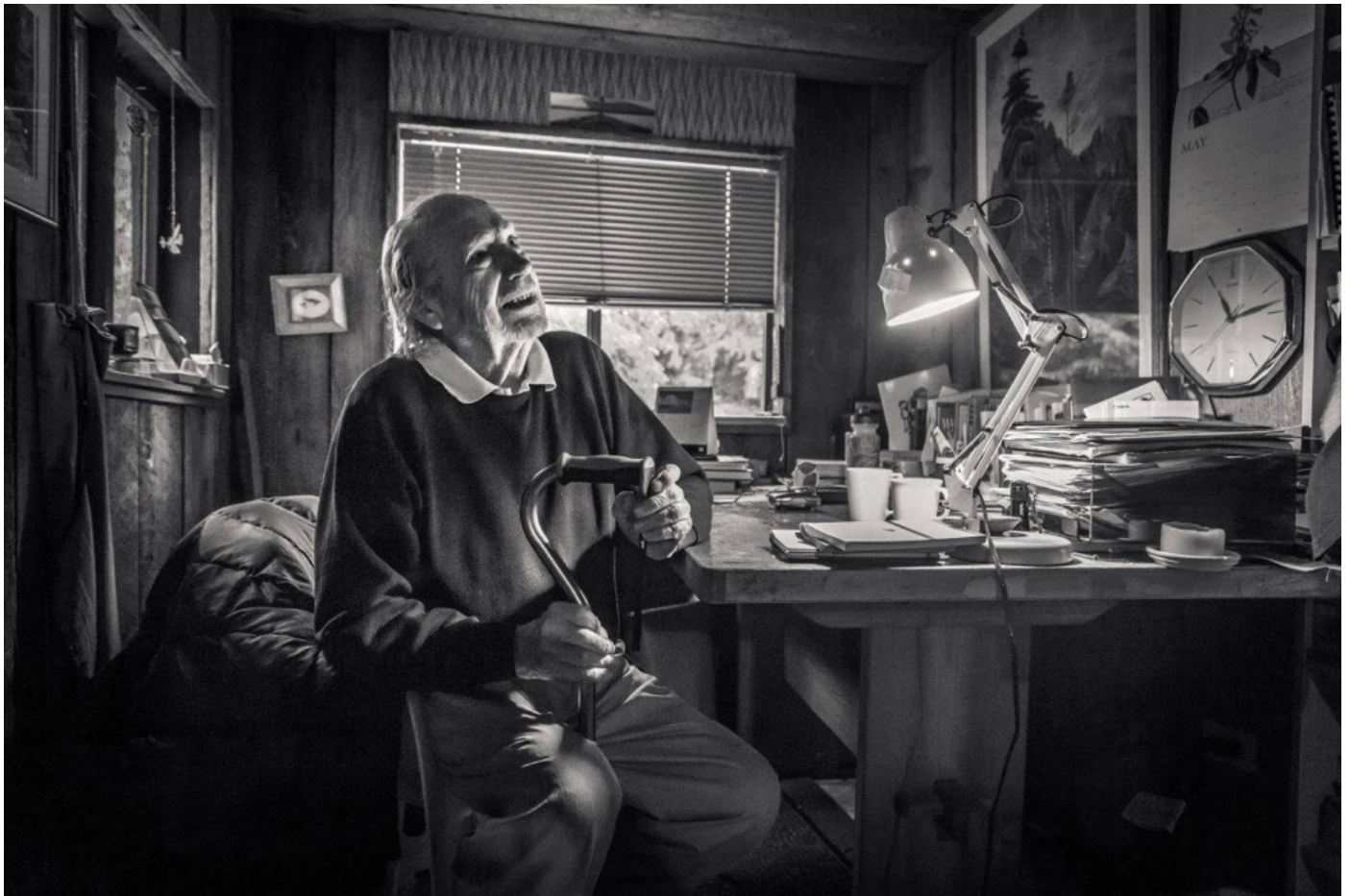


Island environmentalist and Catholic priest-hermit Father Charles Brandt passes away

He devoted his life to protecting and preserving the Comox Valley's natural habitats

[Erin Haluschak](#)



Father Charles Brandt has lived in his hermitage on the 27-acres bordering the Oyster River since 1970. Photo submitted

A well-known Comox Valley environmentalist and Catholic priest-hermit who lived on a 27-acre property in Black Creek has died.

Father Charles Brandt devoted his life to protecting and preserving natural habitats and inspired generations of volunteers to work together to protect and preserve forests and rivers. As a spiritual leader and conservationist, he helped establish the Tsolum River Task Force, which ultimately became the Tsolum River Restoration Society.

He continued to act as one of the society's directors. He was also instrumental in creating the Oyster River Enhancement Society, contributing to the return of salmon and trout stocks in the river.

In 2019, he granted a conservation covenant on his 27-acre property to the Comox Valley Land Trust which will protect the mature forest and riparian areas in perpetuity.

Brandt, who was 97, passed away early Sunday morning (Oct. 25). According to his close friend Bruce Witzel, Brandt was seriously ill in hospital with pneumonia, he wrote on his blog [Through the Luminary Lens](#).

“Charles lived a life of contemplative prayer as a hermit priest. He was also well-loved and active in the larger community, within and without a diverse circle of his friends and affiliates,” noted Witzel.

In late September 2020, Brandt was named the recipient of the Canadian Museum of Nature's Lifetime Achievement award for their 2020 Nature Inspiration Awards.

Brandt, who was born in Kansas City, MO., became an islander in 1965. A year later, he was ordained to the Catholic priesthood at the Canadian Martyrs Church in Courtenay, which is now a theatre. He was mandated to live the life of a hermit priest.

“Which is pretty unusual,” he told the *Record* in 2011. “I came from the Trappist Monks, that's a benedictine order. Everybody knew about the hermits on Vancouver Island from all over the world. It was a group that wanted more

solitude that you couldn't find in the big order...I came from New Melleray Abbey (Iowa) to join the hermitage on the Tsolum River — when the mine was going in on Mount Washington.”

As a member of the Hermits of St. John the Baptist, Father Charles first lived in a cabin he constructed near Headquarters Creek in the Tsolum River watershed before moving his hermitage to the banks of the Oyster River.

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Prior to moving to Canada, Brandt had served as a navigator with the U.S. air force during the 1940s. He later graduated with a bachelor of science in ornithology from Cornell University and a bachelor of divinity from Nashotah House, a theological seminary in Wisconsin.

Brandt was also a gifted author. His published books include *Meditations From the Wilderness* and *Self and the Environment*.

He was also the subject of a chapter entitled *A Hermit of the Rivers*, which appears in the Stephen Hume book *A Walk with the Rainy Sisters*.

Hume, a writer for the Vancouver Sun, was among a crowd that squeezed into a Campbell River church in 2007 to celebrate Brandt's 40th anniversary as a hermit priest.

Hume writes: “Brandt represents an ancient tradition of wise men and women withdrawing from the world, the better to reflect upon how best to serve God.”

– *With files from Scott Stanfield*

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Father Charles has devoted his life to protecting and preserving natural habitats and has inspired generations of volunteers to work together to protect and preserve forests and rivers. Photo submitted