

A Spiritual NATURE

To the casual observer Father Charles Brandt may not resemble the old-fashioned version of a hermit.

Brandt lives in a secluded home on the banks of the Oyster River, and the house goes well beyond the wooden shack which hermits used to live in centuries ago.

Father Charles Brandt at his home, The Hermitage, located on the banks of the Oyster River. The well known environmentalist has helped compile a new book about spirituality and nature.



But Brandt is fully ordained as a Roman Catholic Church hermit-priest, who spends large amounts of time in quiet and solitary contemplation, meditation and prayer.

Much of that is in lone communion with nature on the 29 acres of wooded property which surround the wooden house, named The Hermitage.

Brandt's love of nature and the environment goes back decades, building over the years and tracing back to the period before he decided to become a hermit-priest and took up the lifestyle he now follows on the banks of the river.

It's led him into activities to protect the environment, which have earned him a higher profile than might be associated with most people's idea of a hermit.

He has been active and even outspoken on a whole variety of environmental issues and makes no apology for that or the strength of his convictions, sometimes in apparent contradiction to the traditional image of his ordained role.

In keeping with his strong belief that people must take an active and even proactive role in defence of nature, he supports a number of groups and organizations in meditation and in the environmental movement.

It's that, his unusual background, and the height of his profile in speaking up on environmental concerns which led to him being approached by a book-publishing company to write a book on the spiritual side of nature.

To date, Brandt has shied away from writing a full book on that, but he has now brought together an anthology of the musings of scores of well-known people who have written on the subject.

With an introduction Brandt wrote on his

The restoration work could be taken as closely allied to environmental protection and restoration which Brandt indicates lie at the heart of some of his most fundamental philosophies.

Brandt is convinced people have slipped away from the intimate relationship and close understanding we once had nature.

"There are four ways of improving our relationship with nature," he said. "One is to have a deeper understanding of the scientific

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point of view of the topic, the book *Meditations From The Wilderness* is to be published by Harper Collins Publishers of Toronto in February. Several of Brandt's photographs illustrate the book.

As a hermit he receives no salary from the Catholic Church and is expected to be largely self-sufficient financially. So over the years he has become developed a reputation as an expert book binder and paper restorer.

way the world was formed, which was evolutionary and is still continuing.

"Second, we don't really experience nature and get free of the artificial world of things that we created. It's artificial."

Brandt feels people should do things to make themselves aware of the enormous scale of world, the universe and space.

"Go out to a mountaintop at sunset just as the world is tipping away from the sun and maybe we'll get a vision that we're living on the back of a whale in the solar system, in a galaxy of 300 billion stars - and there are a trillion galaxies in the universe," he said.

"Third, walking meditation, which is just walking and meditation. You don't have any destination and you're in communication with the whole natural world. Let your anger and competitiveness and frustration fall away."

"Fourth, meditation. You can be a Buddhist or a Taoist or a Hindu or whatever. I just happen to be a Christian."

He said most people look at the earth as a collection of objects to be used and exploited, rather than subjects to be worked with.

In the process, he says, people have become "hard of hearing" and are no longer hearing what the environment is trying to tell them.

"If they're just objects then we can use and exploit them. Look what we've done to the forests and rivers and fish. But each item has tremendous worth in it."

"Nature is a source of wisdom. Native people go to it for wisdom and St. Francis in the 12th Century said there are two forms of revelation: Biblical-based wisdom and the natural world." He hopes he helps bring out some of that through the collection of writings in *Meditations From The Wilderness*.

Over the years, Brandt has become an established photographer.

His photographs of natural wonders like this waterfall at Yosemite, left, are included in the book *Meditations From the Wilderness*, to be released next spring.

