

[on the] spot*

* **NAME:** Nancy Klein Maguire
GIG: Author of "An Infinity of Little Hours"

KLEIN MAGUIRE's new book follows the path of five young men who joined the demanding Carthusian monastic order in 1960. After five years, these novice monks must decide whether to stay forever or leave. The Carthusians practice an ascetic form of spiritualism that goes back, virtually unchanged, to the order's inception in the early 11th century. Klein Maguire, a scholar-in-residence at the Folger Shakespeare Library since 1983, was able to get access and explore this secretive society in depth partly because her husband is an ex-Carthusian.

Being a scholar, did you identify with the monks' desire for solitary study?

Yes. I find that being a scholar requires a tremendous amount of

solitude and concentration. I can only write in solitude. I find it a lonely business, but one to which I am addicted.

Why do you think mental disorders seemed to afflict so many monks?

The life is very difficult, both physically and psychologically. The necessary quality for any Carthusian is balance. If the monk goes overboard on penance, solitude or even prayer, he will lose his human balance and find himself in trouble.

When was your husband a Carthusian and why did he leave? Can you name him?

I'm not going to for two reasons: One, it will spoil the story. Many readers have reported what fascinated them about the book was trying to figure out which of the five monks would make it to solemn profession. Two, the agreement I made with the monks I interviewed was



CONTEMPLATION: D.C. author Nancy Klein Maguire studied the lives of monks.

that I would protect their privacy. Without their generosity and transparency, I could not have written the book. This agreement, of course, also applies to my husband.

You mention that ex-Carthusians can be difficult to live with. Why?

Once a Carthusian always a Carthusian. A Carthusian who remains for four to five years has learned extraordinary self-directedness. He has lived alone successfully, with almost unlimited time to himself. On balance, however, an ex-Carthusian is a great husband

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because his level of commitment and trust is total.

Are you religious? If so, how did the book affect your spirituality?

I would describe myself as very spiritual, and the book deepened that trait. Earlier in my life, I was a typical Washingtonian — pursue people who can advance your career. I now find myself more interested in God than in advancing a career.

CHRISTOPHER PORTER

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