



A new American woman has come to join the community of nuns, after serving her novitiate in California. Her name is Sister Edith and she is an anthropologist by training. Like me, she has grown-up children and an ex-husband. I can't for the life of me understand why she would be drawn to a vision of such austerity. She says she doesn't find it austere! There you are. Life at Plum Village often reminds me of the joke about a man who goes to hell and finds himself sitting in a room with an old couple who are happily showing slides of their trip to Florida. In agony he remonstrates with the devil, concluding with the final complaint, "And if this is hell, why is that old couple so happy while I'm miserable?" The devil smiles, "God and I hate to waste space. You're in

hell, but the old couple is in heaven." This is a good Buddhist story.

Sister Edith taught me something yesterday about listening. She was drawn to a certain Buddhist monk as a teacher. She had a problem she wanted to talk about and asked him for a consultation. He asked her out into the garden under a full moon, looked around slowly with appreciation of the scene, tucked his robes formally around him, assumed the lotus position, and closed his eyes. Then he breathed, "I am ready," and listened to her for an hour without saying a word. At the end he said, "I understand."

When you are listened to like that, she said, your whole life is up for grabs. ■

—from *The Barn at the End of the World: The Apprenticeship of a Quaker, Buddhist Shepherd*, by Mary Rose O'Reilley