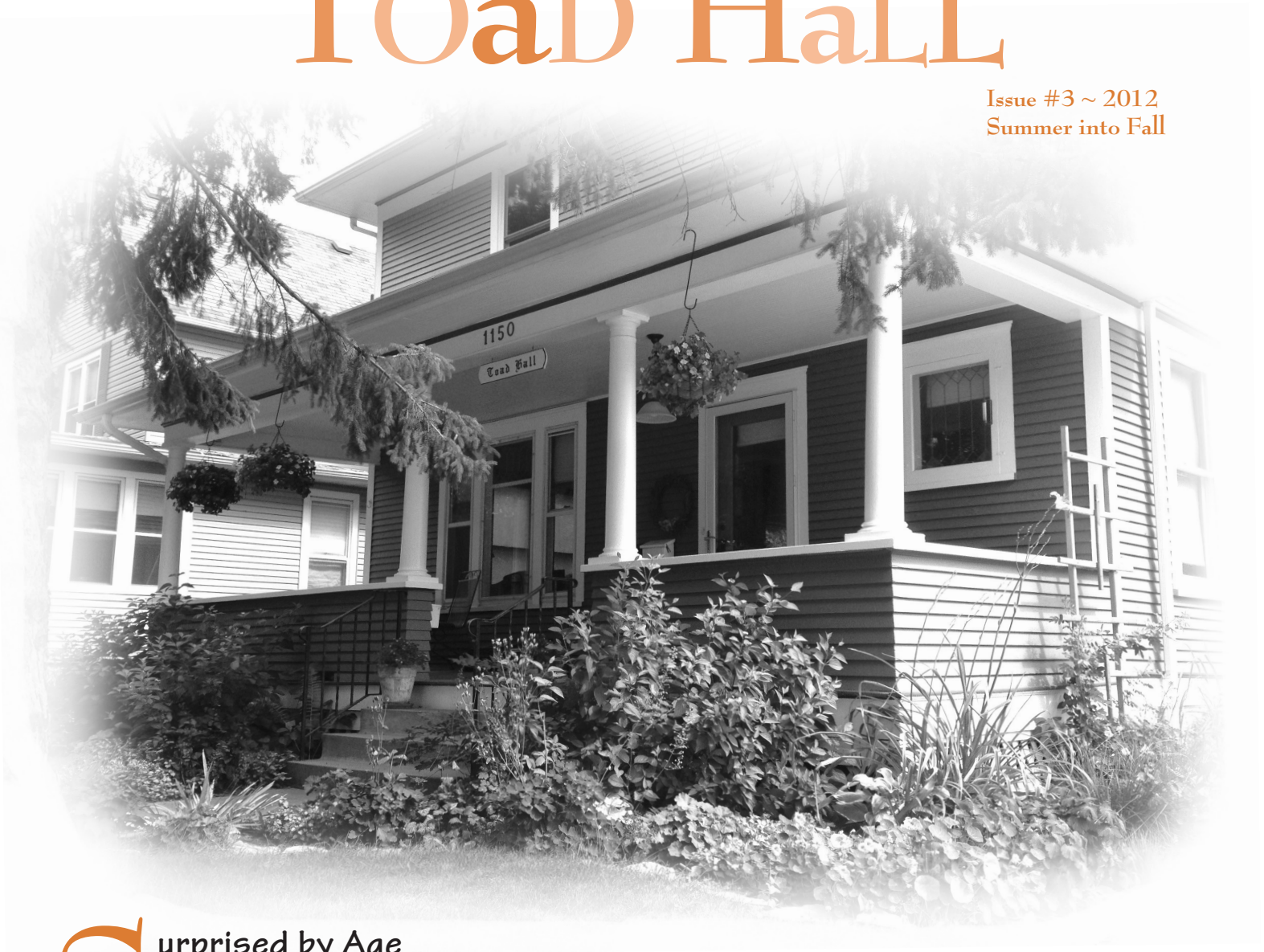


# Notes from Toad Hall

Issue #3 ~ 2012  
Summer into Fall



## **S**urprised by Age

When I was visiting my daughter, her son Mason, who was seven, quietly took her aside and said, "Mom, could I ask White-haired Grandma to go to the park with me to watch me ride my bike? She could sit on the bench because she is so old and tired and there are benches there so she can sit." He really emphasized the benches. (I've been white since my late 30s and have trouble seeing myself as others see me. The youth of my face used to be a surprise, even to myself, but as it fades – it is less so.) Sember said, "Well, I don't know about calling her 'sooo old' – how would she feel about that?" Looking dismayed, he interrupted, "I wasn't being mean, I just meant

she could sit down to *rest*.” This was his dear kindness as he thought of how to involve me, with my limitations, in the things he loves.

“There sits Olav the mechanic on a chair in front of a computer screen with long shining columns of figures. None of them is red, as far as I can see. He has a steaming cup of coffee in one hand and a chocolate bar in the other. He must be twenty years younger than I am, but I’m no longer surprised when I realize that mature men are well below my own age.” p 69.

I just finished reading *Out Stealing Horses* by Per Petterson. He’s a Norwegian author who writes the sad, but good story of Trond Sander, a man who experienced tragic events as a boy but carried them deep, as if by not ever looking at them they would go away. Of course they didn’t and he was affected all his life. They resurfaced when he retired at age sixty-seven and was forced to honestly face his memories and make peace with them.

The quote is not so profound as all that, but it interested me that when Trond, steps into that store run by Olav, a man twenty years younger; he is able to acknowledge he is no longer middle-aged, he could not even be called mature. He is old. Both Petterson and my grandson are being truthful. This sharply jerks me



Mason LaRose, 7

because I don’t want to be a person surprised by the natural changes of aging. But often I am surprised and rueful. I don’t watch the evening news on television. Apart from its annoying sensationalism and lack of useful information – do you notice who is the target for advertising? Me. I am the grandmother rubbing her sore, arthritic hands. I am the older woman struggling to ride her bike through a park. I am the allergy-ridden person sneezing in

the garden. I am decidedly NOT the man thinking of romance as he gazes at the setting sun, his arm around a gray-haired woman. But I count some beautiful mentors among my friends, like my nonagenarian friend, Joan Vagt, whose wisdom helps me walk even if I cannot run as Hebrews 12 exhorts us to do: “And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Knowing Jesus as I do, I know it’s just fine for me to walk.

### Surprised by a Sale

Early this spring, we went to an estate sale in a little Mississippi River town not far from Rochester. It was in a small home that belonged to a lady in her 90s who now lives in a care facility. She was a hoarder, but an interesting one. Some hoarders leave such a heartbreaking legacy of trash we can hardly bear to look

because their hurts are like crates of elephants crammed floor to ceiling throughout the house and all you can do is park construction dumpsters outside and start hauling it out. Over the years this lady learned many different crafts and became skilled in them all. She must have completed thousands of projects for people she loved – I assume she loved them – knitting, crocheting, embroidering, sewing. There were rugs she had woven, afghans, armloads of yarn and wool, fabric by the ton. All sorts of knick-knacks, scrapbooks, candles, seasonal decorations, quilts. The inventory was so huge the family needed three separate weekends to open her home to garage-salers,



Estate Sale - Porch

dealers and collectors. I came on the last day after many had come and gone. Truckloads had already departed and still the amount of inventory was difficult to grasp.

I took home two skeins of red yarn woven together in an unfinished crocheted piece. This became a yarn bomb downtown, a scarf on the neck of one of the Mayo Brothers statues. I am afraid of hoarding and must have some idea of what can be done with it before I purchase. I couldn’t



resist an old wooden stool for eight dollars. I love its worn smooth look and it fits right under the butcher block in the kitchen, and when pulled out it becomes an observation post for a visitor to rest in the midst of the kitchen's maelstrom. Anita bought a large, white enamel pot perfect for dying wool, and a wool braided rug – the kind women used to make from worn out coats, suits and sweaters.

Meticulously crafted, the braids are perfectly even, the rug lies flat without bulges or waves.

In an upstairs bedroom there were stacks of women's undergarments dating back to the 1950s that gave me a little stun-buzz. Hanging from a curtain rod was a row of foundation garments. A lady's corset for two dollars, like the kind my grandmother used to wear. I almost purchased it for the astonishing historical progress we've made as women.... Or have we? Now I think of it, we have even more costly and invasive methods of pulling in our stomachs and tightening our buns.

I think about my own collections in our attic, on my loaded bookshelves, on my computer. What is their value, their significance?



*Corset \$2*

One day I will leave them and my hallucinations about how much meaning or money an estate sale will bring to my offspring. My office has stacks of notes, handwritten. Many drafts of my memoir. Bundles of letters from people I love. Dozens of handmade cd collections given by friends. And worse, much worse are the files on my computer. Photos by the thousand, archived emails, snippets of prose and quotes I

can't delete. If I could throw, delete, sell, steadily lighten the load so others don't need to drag them to the dump, won't I be giving my survivors a gift? I ponder this. Perhaps even if you're young, you also need think about what you keep, what you don't need, will never need. We have a friend who has saved string of all kinds over many years until it has become a fond joke for



*Old wooden stool \$8*

those of us who love and tease him. The ball has grown until the last I knew of it, it was too heavy to carry and almost too large to get out of the closet where it was stored. It's a lesson I take personally. If it isn't functional or beautiful (to me) get rid of it. Unwittingly,

he helps me clean my closets and reorganize the old wardrobe downstairs. Thank you, Jack S.

## Surprised by the Moon

"There are days we live as if death were nowhere in the background; from joy to joy to joy, from wing to wing, from blossom to blossom to impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom."

*From Blossoms by Li-Young Lee*

When you walk through giant revolving doors into the soaring architectural spaces supported by marble walls and floors



*White enamel pot \$5*

with giant works of art at the Mayo Clinic, and look out on the perfect gardens and cityscapes that shimmer beyond fifteen stories of glass, it is no wonder you hope to meet an expert who

will surely fix your ills. Sadly, some patients come to Mayo only to learn nothing can save them. They come with families, or friends, or a hired escort. They stand among crowds of employees hurrying to offices and labs. They move more slowly carrying appointment schedules and children in their arms. They are pushed in wheelchairs, dragging walkers and leaning on others. Into this universe of suffering and hope, I made my way to the banks of elevators that take me to the rheumatology department. Even the elevators suggest you are being lifted in the right direction –

they are fast, noiseless and smooth. I paused in the main lobby to look over the edge at the cavernous crossroads below. Natural light from courtyards streamed across the vast formal space. There were comfortable seating areas among potted palms.

I paused because I heard music. There was a grand piano below me where a man played rippley smooth backup to a woman who probably looked like me – someone I wouldn't ever want to hear, but I stood riveted because she was perfect. In her smoky Dinah Washington voice, she was singing songs I dislike because they are sentimental rubbish. "Fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars... waa, wah wa." People of all sorts gathered. Bent forms in wheelchairs, white chemosed heads, pale faces with darkened eyes listened and mouthed the words along with her. Someone's grandpa, or mother, or child. Nearly every person smiled and tapped a foot. Some wiped tears and blew their noses. They were as surprised as I to find this human dimension of sweetness – a diversion from suffering, softly reminiscent of a love or a life that was, perhaps, departing soon. Here, in the hard-surfaced beauty of the clinic, I listened in appreciation and surprise although this will never be my favorite kind of music. But isn't this what I want but am too snotty to admit: that someone would fly us

to the moon and love us even to the breakdown of body and mind in death?

I still want to grow, looking on small joys with more kindness toward myself and others than when I was

a younger. I appreciate a capacity for impossible, even humorous beauty shining from unlikely places. It dislodges me from the numbness of life. Last Sunday I sat in front of

a little girl who hummed very softly under her breath with exaggerated vibrato during the entire sermon. Inside I laughed and thanked God for such a child. Today I walked along the creek that winds through our neighborhood park and noticed a downed oak tree, but when I looked more closely, I saw it hadn't fallen at all – it had been gnawed by an urban beaver who must have intended to drag it to the water. Shocking to consider how in a single night a mammal the size of a pillow pet can mow down a tree that would take me a week to chop with an axe. Farther along the bank on a shallow gravel bed some splashing caught my attention. I only identified them later, but there were about

twenty white suckers maybe two pounds each; they were spawning. As they busily circled and thrashed, a throng of tiny fish darted toward the bed gobbling fresh milt and roe. Jerem, our son, called me one day last fall, a year after they finally moved into their own house, as he was walking the dog down the country road – passing along their driveway lined with paper birch, bright layers of parchment, leaves glowing yellow among the blue spruce, crossing the wide ditch filled with waving cattails, awed by joy he said, "I still can't believe we have all this to enjoy. Who would have thought?" All these gifts!

In spite of our cynicism, which can be a nasty business when dumped on people and the things they enjoy, we all have our affections, don't we? I'll bet I know exactly what you said the

last time you saw a full moon because I've said it myself so many times. Didn't you say, "Look at the moon!" as if you hadn't seen the very same glistening orb rising over the trees a hundred times?

More reasons for loving Jesus and all He gives – not a weak, sentimental faith, not a saccharine or self-

indulgent faith, but a strong sweet belief that roots us in creation. There is really none other who can actually "fly me (us) to the moon."



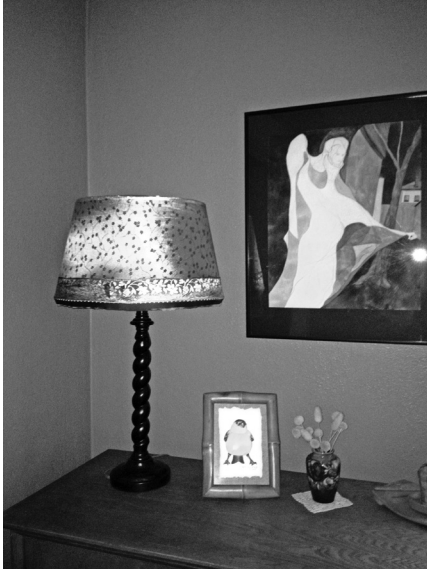
*Braided rug \$40*



*Mayo Lobby*

# Hospitality Notes

## Sticky Lessons from DIY



*Lamp Recovered*

Part of hospitality is creating spaces in our homes that make people feel welcome. For me, that has meant paying attention to details that, to some, may seem tedious or unworthy like the color of the walls and what hangs on them. It means leaving a stack of interesting books in the guest room. Or encouraging visitors to open the refrigerator to grab a drink. I don't know why people are so reluctant to open that door as if it's like sneaking a peek at my prescriptions in the medicine cabinet. I say not at all! You must feel welcome.

After all these years of addressing the small issues of what rug, what vase, my attention can still turn to what lamp. A new one was needed for the corner of our freshly-painted dining room and since I can't always buy whatever suits my fancy, lucky me, I found the perfect lamp at "Cherished Treasures and Antiques."

Then I found an exciting DIY DISH video on recovering your lampshade with Kim & Kris, an excitable pair of twins who can tell you exactly how to do anything for next to nothing. Easy peasy.

From our scrap pile I found a perfect piece of silk and enthusiastically cut a piece to fit. The video made it look simple. All I needed was scissors, fabric glue and spray adhesive, which she made a point of mentioning, is "very forgiving." I began on the dining room table and then had the sense to move a card table onto the porch and cover it with towels to protect it from the spray as I worked. It was evening but still 90 degrees when I began working the fabric onto the shade, spraying a bit at a time and smoothing it over the surface. In a matter of seconds the fabric was fiercely wrapped around my arm and stuck to my chest, drops of sweat fell on the fabric leaving salty stains. Before I died or killed myself, I moved back to the kitchen where it was a little cooler, covered the butcher block and finished it there. After wrapping and unwrapping, all the while fraying the edges more, I got it in place only to find the seams barely met at the center back. I stretched and fudged, messing with it until it looked like a four-year-old nursery school project. And by the way, no one mentioned the glue would melt my nail polish leaving dark blue stains along the seam. Perfectionism not being my area of neurosis, I turned the seam to the back and no one will ever know, except for you.

The other unfortunate thing was my iPhone lying nearby; its surface was coated with adhesive drift. I didn't notice until later when I picked it up to text and my finger stuck to the power button. Plus Anita's computer was lying on the radiator behind the butcher block and got it, too. Not good.

The good part, however: we can now see our dinner on the table. And if I can learn to live with imperfection, so can you.



# Ransom Notes

## Looking Ahead

September 21-23 Vernon Hillis, IL. ***The Lakeview Conference on Film: Story Matters***. A timely, exciting topic. Denis is the main speaker, but there will also be a movie screening to watch and discuss, fascinating workshops with people working in film, people who care about narrative, technical excellence, creative risks and relevance to the Christian faith. I get to join them with a workshop: "Healing the Wounded: Stories of Hospitality at the Movies." Registrations are open. For more information go to *The Lakeview Conference on Film* at <http://lakeviewfilm.org/conference/> ht

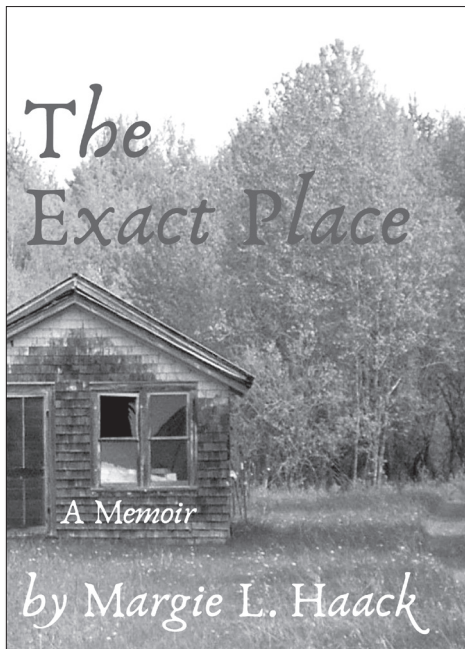
## Summer Low

As often happens, we are facing the summer financial dip. So far this year we are flying low, but not crashing. We may not need to miss paychecks. Wonderful. But if it does happen, at least we will eat. Each week we get a free CSA box. Plus, for some reason, we joined a bulk food co-op and on a groaning shelf in the basement we have 5 pounds each of pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, great northern white beans – in what gas cloud was I living?! At the rate the drought is going in the Midwest, there'll be no water to cook them.

We are grateful for you who pray and give. I know it represents caring and support on so many levels. There were even some designated gifts to help with medical expenses that brought tears and a deep sense of God's extravagant grace. Thank you.

## Fall High

I am on a high. After years of writing, rewriting, waiting and yammering about it, the memoir I've written, *The Exact Place*, is being published.



*The Exact Place* is coming out with Kalos Press, a literary imprint of Doulos Resources. I can hardly believe it. Kalos is a young press with some marvelous books and authors coming down the line. I can't wait to see them. Kalos has done a beautiful job of putting my project together. I'm proud and happy to be with them. At the last moment they spared me from self-publishing. (I would have made a hurricane-size mess out of layout.)

I don't expect to become famous, but I do need a new pair of shoes.

I do expect to pray that this book will give a gift of hope and love for God - the way the Gospel regenerates us and shines through all the landscapes of our lives.

A note about the cover: it's a photo I took last summer of the house where I grew up as it stands now. Haunting, lovely, impoverished.

*The Exact Place* will be released in September.

You can pre-order now at a special price. I hope you do.

**Go here:** [TheExactPlace.net](http://TheExactPlace.net). This site will direct you.

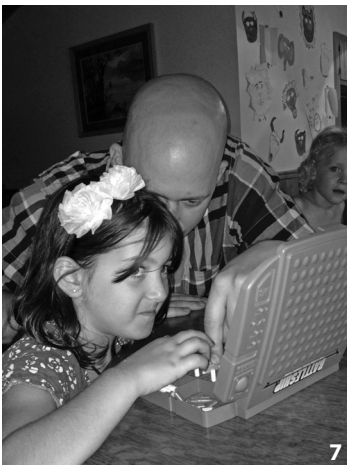
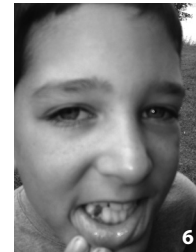
**Or call:** Doulos Resources/Kalos Press: 901-201-4612

There will be links on [www.ransomfellowship.org](http://www.ransomfellowship.org) for ordering.

# Family Notes

## Ten best things about a week in June:

Sparklers. Swinging in the hammock. Grilling brisket. Playing games.  
Swimming. Sharing a single bathroom. Feeding a hundred parakeets.  
Eating outside. Sitting on the dock. Everyone.



1. Ava Lou lights up
2. Elisha in the aviary
3. Paige & Isobel with biggest fish evar
4. Jerem, Anson, Marsena
5. Everyone
6. Kaiden loses a tooth
7. Strategy for a hit
8. End of the day
9. Swimming

# Final Notes

## Living in the City

Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero said shortly before his assassination: "I am going to speak to you simply as a pastor, as one who, together with his people, has been learning the beautiful but harsh truth that the Christian faith does not cut us off from the world but immerses us in it; the church is not a fortress set apart from the city. The church follows Jesus, who lived, worked, struggled and died in the midst of a city, in the polis." \*

This places us in a life I recognize – not that my personal life is in danger – in the city, the world, the social network where I learn that many of our brothers and sisters world-wide face a life more difficult and dangerous than my own.

It's the easiest thing to become devoted to protecting my interests from the struggles of the world so that I am shocked when difficulty and peril finally reaches us. For example, I recall that when I heard about the wildfires burning Colorado, I was complaining about how hot it was in Rochester.



*Photo taken by Carol Crom*

*Colorado wildfire evacuation*

Reports quickly began coming from folks who lived in or near the fires. One man drove to the home of his brother-in-law's family who were out of the country on a mission project. He had ten minutes to gather what was most important to them before it burned down. The "beautiful but harsh truth of faith" led many to create refuge in their homes for hot and weary victims. There were deeply inspiring reminders of following Christ into the world, even one that is on fire.

I'd like to understand and live better with the paradox of a church that is a mighty fortress and yet enters the world and touches people in all walks of life.



Warmly, (as I am at 98 degrees F)

Margie

Resource: *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* by Claiborne, Wilson-Hartgrove, and Okoro

## About Notes from Toad Hall

Toad Hall is the name of our home, christened by our children. It is from the book *The Wind in the Willows*, a favorite of ours. In it Mole, a shy yet daring character, and Ratty, who is much nicer and more sensible than his name would imply, have many adventures along the river. One of their friends is Toad of Toad Hall. Toad is something of an aristocrat and lives in a mansion. Otherwise, he has very little to commend him and really doesn't deserve friends since he is a callous liar, lacks common sense and, well, he lives for the pleasure of the moment—which brings him no end of trouble.

When we moved to Minnesota in 1981, our children had rarely seen such tall homes with their imposing three stories. They were used to one-story adobes which rambled along in the hot New Mexico sun. So, to them, a midwestern Gothic four-square looked amazingly like a mansion. Possibly even as great a house as Toad Hall.

*Notes from Toad Hall* is not available by subscription. Rather, interested readers can request to be added to Ransom's mailing list, which is updated frequently. Donors to Ransom Fellowship, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-deductible ministry, are added automatically unless requesting otherwise. Everyone on Ransom's mailing list also receives *Critique* magazine. To receive them send your mailing address to:

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