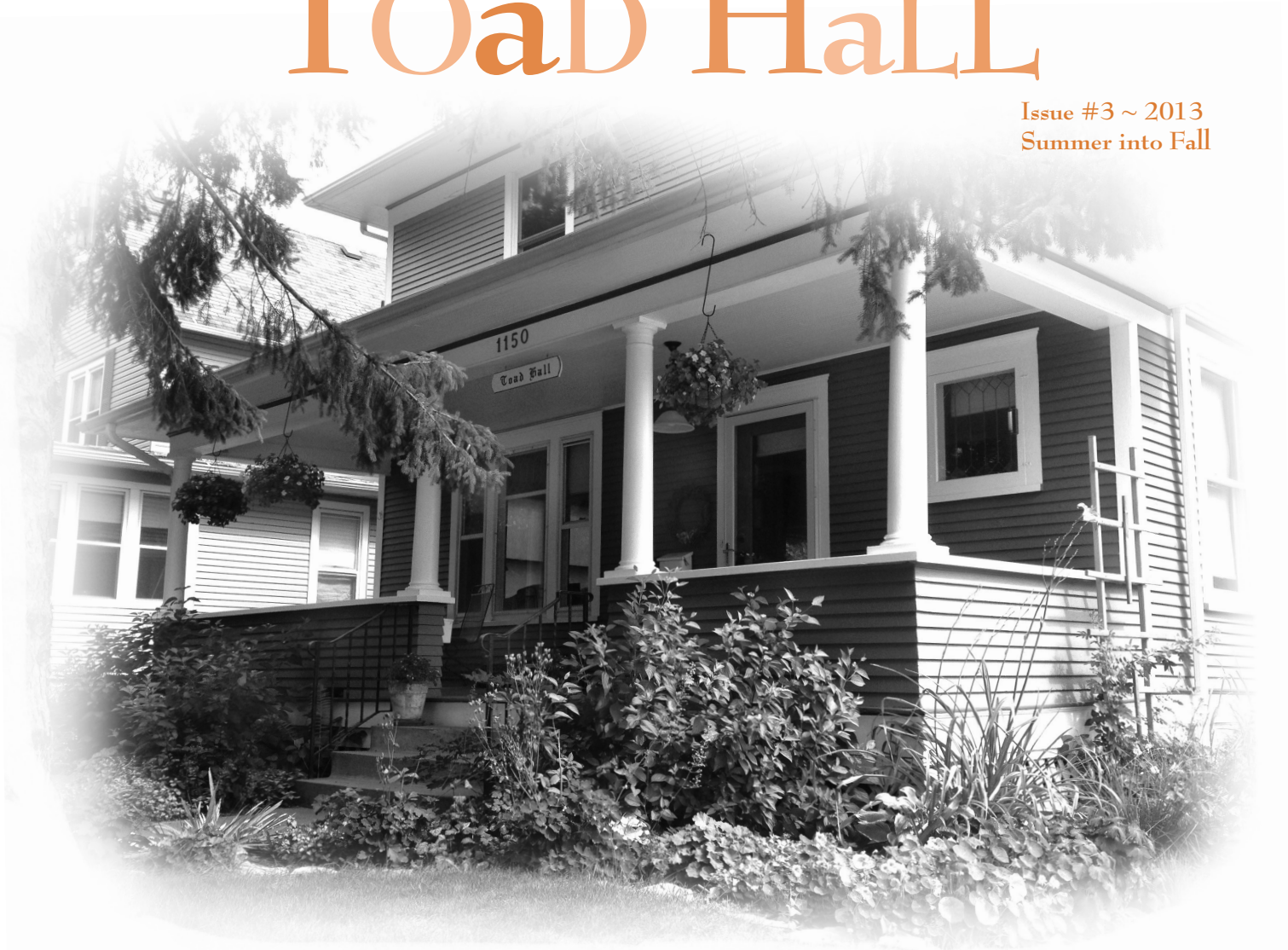


Notes from Toad Hall

Issue #3 ~ 2013
Summer into Fall



Wrenching Yourself

Today I wrenched myself. I wonder what to make of it. (Sometimes writing down the details helps a story sort itself and you begin to understand. Oh, this is about this. Or that. Perhaps that will happen this afternoon. Perhaps I've distorted my life to fit a particular theory or, or, ...)

I left for the mall this morning after a meeting with Marcy, Ransom's bookkeeper. It had to be a quick stop on my way to the bank. After my business at the mall, I quickly headed for the car. Looking up and down the row, I could not see our car anywhere. I pressed the "honk" button on my keys, but didn't hear a thing. I stood puzzled. (These

are frightening moments for people my age. Our brains begin frantically beeping. Red alert! Red alert! And worse than the brain not finding a reason to console the heart, is when it finds nothing at all. Nothing.) One way I remember where I park is by recalling which direction I was headed when I found an empty spot – was I pointed toward the entrance or away? I knew it was toward. Wasn't it? I looked in the next row, but the car wasn't there either. Or the next. That was when a woman getting out of her SUV stopped to ask if I'd lost



kindness to strangers, *not* receiving it. She finally left me alone in a desert of cars and walked toward the doors. Complete in my humiliation, I looked up at the sky, and that was when,

because I have big, important writing deadlines and should be putting words on paper right this second. As I came out, I passed Marcy on her way into the bank with a Ransom deposit. I waved and smiled. Outside, I stopped and thought, why, Margie, you could save her a trip back to our house if you waited a minute for the receipts.

That was when I turned around, tripped on the curb and fell face down. I could attribute this weakness to the achy joints I'd been nursing all week, but again, I don't think that entirely *explained* this either. For what seemed like hours, I lay on the sidewalk. More humiliation. Why did God allow this? (God is remarkably patient with unjustified blame.) My knee felt exploded, my wrist hurt and I had managed to hit my lip on the sidewalk. Our bank is a very quiet place and not a soul came in or out, nor did a car drive past as I finally pulled myself to a sitting position and sat thinking that if anyone *did* come along and express the smallest degree of sympathy I would begin sobbing. No. I'd wail. Loud, mournful howls. With more groaning, I hoisted myself up and hobbled to the car.

wrench |renCH|
Verb [with obj.]

- ~ pull or twist (someone or something) suddenly and violently. . .
- ~ injure (a part of the body) as a result of a sudden twisting movement. . .
- ~ turn with a wrench. . .
- ~ *archaic* distort to fit a particular theory or interpretation. . .

my car. Embarrassed, I admitted yes. Was my wandering that obvious? She sympathetically recalled, I did that just last week. Looked everywhere. Couldn't remember where I'd parked. What color is your car? Dark blue, Ford 500. Why it's right there! she pointed. No, that's a Chevrolet. Shall I drive you around? I can do that. Why don't I? No, no, it's okay, it's got to be right here somewhere.

By then I was mentally calling Denis to tell him our car had been stolen. Really, she insisted, I can take you. This was too much kindness; I had to refuse. I should be the one showing

through some kind of electrifying nerve-burst, (God? Holy Spirit?) I remembered I had driven Anita's car, not our own. And her car happened to be the one sitting right in front of me. I gave a loud groan (I may have cussed) and the lady who was still within earshot hollered, Did you find it? Did you find it?! Then I had to explain that I had forgotten I'd borrowed a car This does not really *explain*, though, does it?

Twisting the Wrench

I headed to the bank in a hurry to get back home



I'm home now. Working from bed. I was planning on having what I call a "Bed Day" anyway. I tell myself this since it looks like I'll need more time for recovery from recent travels and schedule. Now that I've added more body parts to the problem, how will I get everything done that needs doing? I've received plenty of sympathy at home. Denis suggests I begin using a walker (right, dude) but he has brought me ice tea, my cell phone, and a pillow. Anita says she'll make lunch. (She made supper, too.)

Distorting to Fit

That morning, I had awakened early from a fitful night. Denis *seemed* awake when I asked him what he thought about a dilemma I was pondering: I need to write this issue of *Notes From Toad Hall* and it takes hours of work and concentration. There's no way I'll make this Saturday's deadline. But we are going away for two nights next week. Days off are difficult to manage around here because Toad Hall is also our work, our offices. It is everywhere and cries to us. From the basement to the attic we hear it calling "Emails, emails, emails! Phone call! Doorbell, doorbell! Read me, read me." I thought of three options: 1. Simply look at the days as time for Denis to take off. I would go along, but keep working. 2. Limit self to 3 hours of work each day and the rest of the time be off the grid. 3. Or just believe you need this time away, too. Kick your schedule in the butt. You made it up yourself, anyway, not some CEO who



Bed day

threatens your life.

Denis replies with half his brain intact, "**Number 3,**" then falls back asleep.

I'm going with it. I gave my word. But let me tell you, it's not so easy. My being, my life, my brain are programmed to kill self before giving up. I am a responsible, committed, dependable, boundary-less, hard-working wretch and God forbid someone should find me floating on an air mattress in some lake somewhere.

I know, that's sick. But what can I do about it?

Maybe THAT is what the morning was about?! I wrench myself and finally get the message? Fall down, rack my knee, hobble around with a walking stick, and go to bed immediately after supper because I think I need to save the world and fix every little whatever? And the firm answer is YOU CAN'T. I'm expert at telling others that they need to take care of

themselves. Play. Get rest. Get refreshed.

To be honest, I need help. "Professional" help. Not that I've ever had a problem with *others* getting counseling – but for me I've always felt we couldn't afford the cost or the time. Now that I'm seeing this person, I'm sorry I waited so long. I was all prepared to understand how Denis' problems affect me and how if he changed, then I'd get all better.

But the first thing this counselor suggests is that I might want to read a book called *Boundaries: When to say yes, how to say no to take control of your life* by Cloud & Townsend. I'm like awwwwwww. I heard about it forever, but was quite sure it was full of stuff I already knew. I dutifully ordered it because I am, after all, Responsible Oldest Child and wish to please.

Taking care of yourself by saying "no, I can't" is a troublesome thought to those who want to follow Christ whatever the cost and will bleed from every orifice in order to say yes. It is also troublesome for those of us who see

What Christ calls us to isn't the same thing as saying yes to everyone and everything.

that our current culture basically encourages everyone to be efficiently self-indulgent, self-focused, and to never restrict our pleasure. I do know this. Denis and I – to prove we stood against this at one point – sold everything we had. Gave away all our money AND our car in order to prove

we wanted to be good disciples. This, I now see, was not good discipleship. We were idealistic and had no idea how to follow God with every ounce of our being unless we gave ground to every need that stirred our hearts.

Touching others after all

As I read the book and try to listen with unbiased ears, every so often it hits a homerun.

“...don’t boundaries turn us from other-centeredness to self-centeredness? The answer is no. *Appropriate boundaries actually increase our ability to care about others.*”

What Christ calls us to isn’t the same thing as saying yes to everyone and everything. “Self-care is never a selfish act – it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch.”
– Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*.

My head must contain years of neurological entrenchment and an archive full of boundary violations. I don’t know when to stop worrying



Me floating in the Frio River in Texas

about other people. Some of the more pressing questions are: if I don’t, who will? What will so-and-so think of me if I don’t? I’m afraid I won’t be loved. Why did I start this pattern? Where does this trouble come from?

Perhaps one beginning. As a child I was obsessed with anxiety about our house burning down. When my parents were gone and I was babysitting for my five younger brothers and sisters, I constantly worried about them.

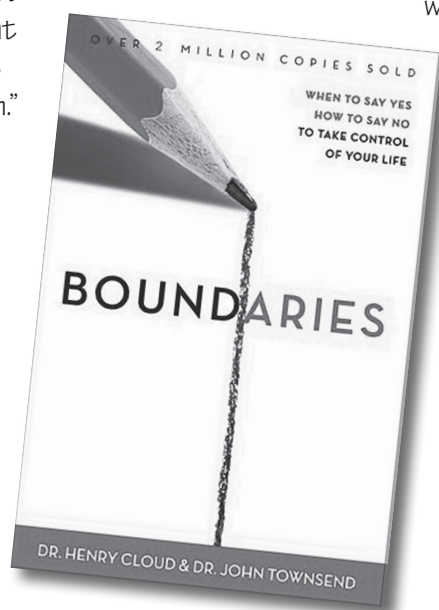
It was bitter cold outside and our front door was frozen shut. How would I get them all out if a fire started? I repeatedly checked the gas burners on the kitchen stove and warily watched our wood stove glow red hot.

As I sat on the hot pavement after falling; it suddenly occurred to me; Marcy needed to come back to our house anyway, so what was I thinking?! Well, I think that for years I’ve been following a path of trying to rescue people from their house fires, even if they’re not real. This is not what Christ requires of me. He often left the multitudes and all their needs behind for various reasons. This path is my own, designed to relieve my own fears. It’s more about myself than others and that smarts.

Learning to say no even to good things so we can say yes to what God has called us to do is scary and requires clarification. It poses lots of questions. What ought we to be doing? How do we take care of ourselves properly? Does it include rest and play? What about real suffering around us?

I can’t fit everything together yet, but I’m listening with expectation.

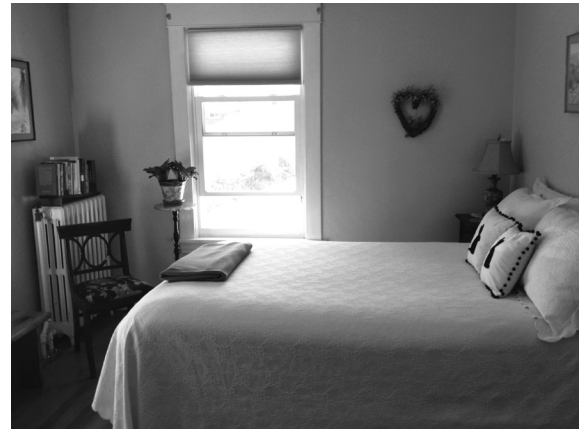
I feel like I have this rare chance to change at an age when people are prone to calcification. I can still grow into a fuller understanding of the Gospel of Christ and that sparks my heart.



Ransom Notes

Early this summer we hosted lots of visitors to Toad Hall. The sheets and towels flew out of the guest bedroom every few days and were freshly made up again. All were people we loved to have - offering cups of cold water, sharing meals, sitting on the back porch talking until the fireflies lit up the evening.

At the same time as I was preparing for travel and speaking, Denis and I were facing creaky spots in our relationship. If we are any example or encouragement to others it's to say that when Christ trains the light of His Gospel on us in order to bring deep things to the surface; it hurts, but it's acutely, thoroughly good. In all God's kindness, he seemed to answer this prayer: "... Now to him who is able to do *immeasurably* more than *all* we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory..." (Ephesians 3:20)



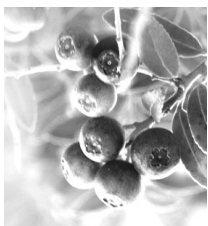
I'm sharing the receipt letter Denis wrote last month. His thoughts on prayer seemed important for all of us, not just our donors. He writes:

This summer I've had reason to go back to basics and think through what I believe, and why. I've reflected on why I am a Christian and whether those reasons withstand careful scrutiny still, after all I have seen and heard and experienced over many years. Eventually, I had to think about prayer, and been renewed in a conviction that if Christ is both risen and Lord, then an active dependence on prayer should characterize my life—much more than it has, in fact. "We are called to live with the love of Christ as the motivating force of our inner being," Jerram Barrs writes, "and actively to depend on the power of God as we seek to serve and obey him. Prayer, moment by moment prayer, is to characterize the people of God, for we are living in a supernatural universe, one open at all times to God's intervention in our lives and in this world." [Francis Schaeffer: A Mind & Heart for God; (2010) p 81]

Would you please join us in praying this will be increasingly true of us? I want it to be true of me, and I want it to be true of Ransom. And then include yourself in your request as well. As the 21st century unfolds, may God's people live—whether anyone notices or not—as if we really, actually believed that we live in a supernatural universe.

Thank you for your prayers, and for giving financially towards our work with Ransom. It is a grace, and we're grateful.
- Denis

Things are quieter for the moment. A good thing because fall begins more travel and commitments for me while Denis pushes ahead on writing projects. Anita is busy with peaches and blueberries this week.



For prayer:

For Margie's continued readings around the Midwest and Women's Retreat in Anchorage, AK.
For Ransom's Staff Retreat in September when we compost ideas and pray about what's ahead.
For the Iowa L'Abri conference in November.
For fall plans to visit Chattanooga, TN where family lives.
For a speaking trip Boca Raton, Florida, still in planning stages.



Hospitali



*"Because hospitality is basic to who we are as followers of Jesus
If we use hospitality as a lens through which to examine our homes, churches
Can we make the places which shape our lives and in which we spend our time"*



Welcome to children



Ezra's hippo, "Still here."

I've been thinking about this in regard to the occasional child that comes to our house. Every week four-year-old Ezra and his mom, Melissa, join us for supper. When they first began coming he was shy, but now he enters our back door as if he knows he belongs (which he does). First, he checks to see if we still have his hippo on the refrigerator, then he heads to the front closet where he pulls out a box of toys. He likes the "goodie box" full of play money, tiny animals, a harmonica and an old stethoscope that allow for imaginative play. Then as he gets seated at the table, if we've forgotten, he politely reminds us that he needs his special plate and cup – a colorful enameled tin set with a surprising parade of ants crawling across the surface.



Ezra cleans up his plate of ants.

When I watch him, I'm reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 25:35, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," Children enter our homes as strangers, and they will feel more welcomed if we make them feel free to enter into our space. There are ways to intentionally extend that invitation to children.

When ours grew up and left home, they left behind boxes and closets tumbling with toys and games – the remnants of their childhood. My first inclination was to get rid of them and re-purpose all that space. After years of stepping on Legos and finding mystery puzzle pieces, I was ready for smooth, clean vistas. Now, I'm glad I didn't pitch everything because grandchildren eventually made their way into our lives.



Caboodle Box full of treasures.

One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: "Let the children alone, don't prevent them from coming to me. God's kingdom is made up of people like these." (Matt. 19:14 *The Message*) And so it is. Having had years to consider many aspects of hospitality, I think that by welcoming children into our living spaces we can actually play some part in welcoming them into God's kingdom.



lity Notes



of Jesus, every aspect of our lives can be touched by its practice.

'hurches, jobs, schools, health care, and politics, might we see them differently?

spend our days more hospitable?" ~ from **Making Room** by Christine Pohl.



Remains of the day

One of the best things I purchased years ago at a junk shop was a sturdy little wooden table and two chairs. Here, just inside our front door, a teddy bear is always waiting for tea to be made from the toy china tea set. This is not just for girls by any means, I've watched many little boys head straight for it and sit down to prepare a "pleasant repast." (The set should definitely be china, because the clink of dishes is too cool, and we can deal with broken dishes of which there have been surprisingly few.)

Everyone needs to keep a few children's books handy. It does not matter whether you have children or not, whether you are single, male, female, renting or owning. No excuse is acceptable. The point is there *will be* a child who visits you some day and one of the easiest ways to say, "I welcome you" is to hand them a special book. As an adult, you get to indulge yourself. Keep books you loved as a child or buy ones you wanted but never owned.

These are a few simple, easy ideas anyone can pull off. By saying "welcome" to children you will be surprised, delighted and blessed by them.

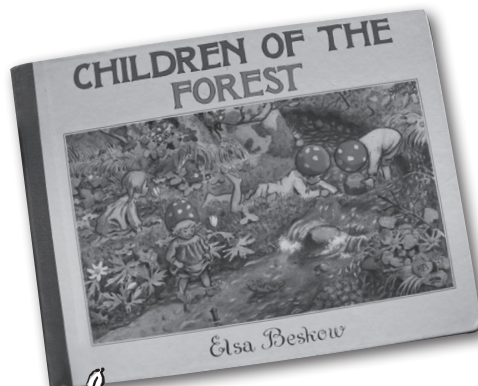


Table set for Two.

Luci makes tea.



Isobel cuddles Honeysuckle, our pet Rabbit.

Children of the Forest
by Elsa Beskow



Final Notes

The unavoidable you

When I was at Laity Lodge this summer, we had a short discussion about the stress and pressures women feel as they age. The need to look youthful and fit. The desire to hide the effects of aging as long as we can. How we sometimes feel ashamed of ourselves.

A few months ago when our 15 year old granddaughter visited, we took a snapshot of ourselves – a close-up of our heads bent together. One eye each filled the entire frame as we smiled into the lens. I was a little shocked when I looked at it. Was that me? I looked *so old* compared to her. I hardly understood the feelings it aroused. Dismay, I think. An urge to delete it real quick. But another part of me paused. There was something touching about the comparison.

I couldn't stop looking at her clear eye. The dark gray rim of her iris with hazel highlights. The clarity and glow of her smooth cheek, the shape of her untouched eyebrow. This was the gorgeousness of young woman-hood on her. Then there was me: white, thinning hair, clouding eye, sagging lid, enlarged pores on the nose. I squinted at the lines across my forehead. I want to be okay looking like this. Besides, as Christians we know very well that resurrection will include the restoration of our bodies – all glorious and at the peak of their game. Meanwhile, God wants us to be nurturing what endures forever, not just our eyelids and glutes.

I put the pic up for everyone to look at and in future I won't be able to deny what's happening.

Andi Ashworth, who was there, too, described author Marva Dawn. How when she saw her speak one time, Marva slowly made her way to the front with a walker. She looked plain. Plainly aged and chronically ill. Her clothes were merely functional. But when she began to talk it was like an angel speaking.

I remember, too, reading something she wrote about not complaining so much about the ache in our big toe, but to be thankful that it has kept our balance and helped us walk these many years before it finally wore out.

I would like to do this well and also be one who could give others courage and joy to be as God has designed us, even as we inevitably age.

Warmly,



Margie Haack



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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