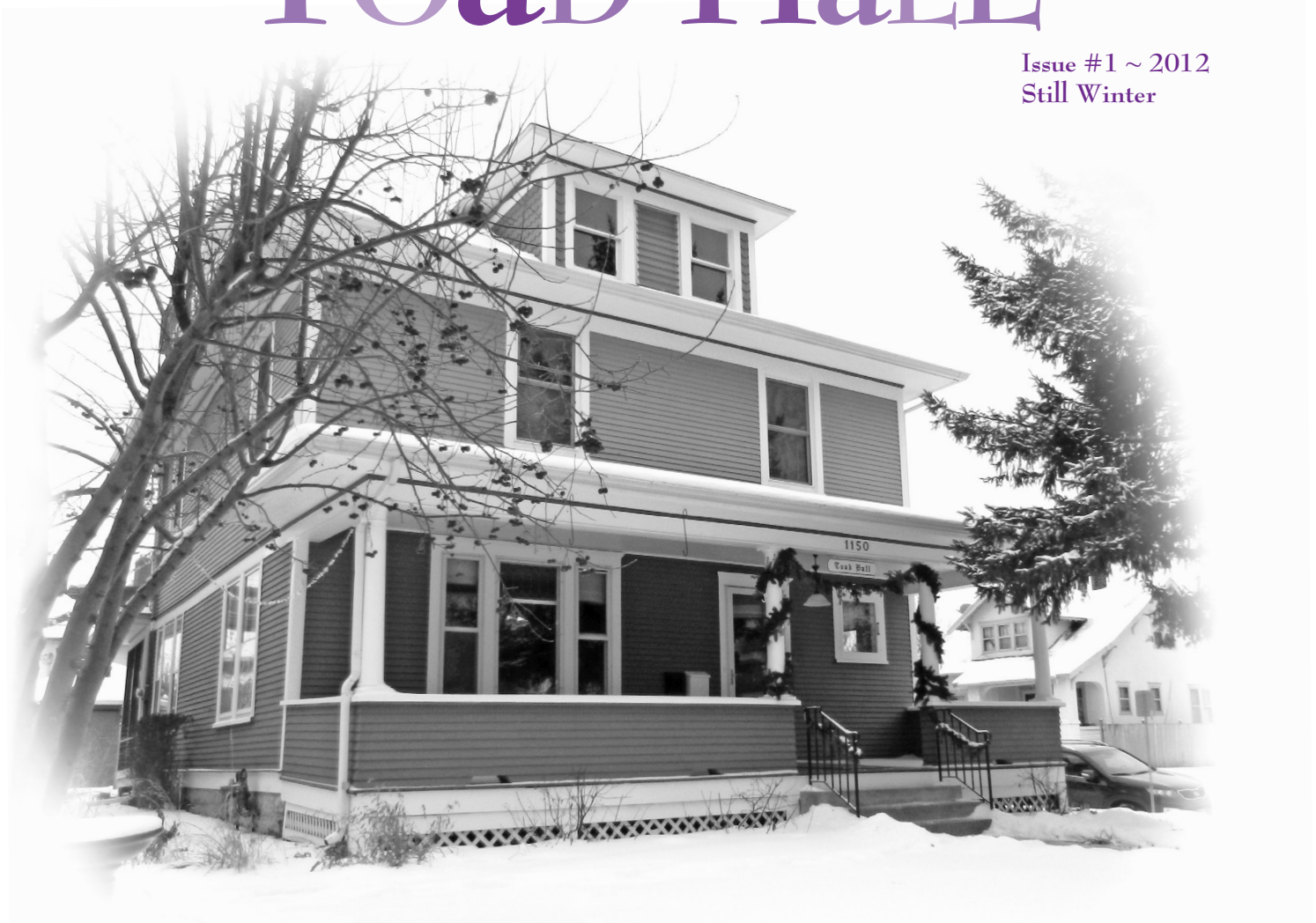


Notes from Toad Hall

Issue #1 ~ 2012
Still Winter



Reclaiming toothpaste

"Dude!! You need to chill!" I don't ordinarily talk like this, calling someone "Dude." It's pretentious for a woman my age. But it seemed appropriate at the time. I had to shout to get Denis' attention because he was flipping out. He walked into the bedroom late one night and asked why there was water under the lid of the flip-top toothpaste container. When he opened it a bunch had spilled out. Welllll. I remember thinking for a second: Margie, you need to lie here. Because you love him. But I couldn't think fast enough. I told the truth. I dropped it in the toilet. Before I could assure him that I had washed it with hot water and soap, he was yelling; and

what could I do? I hadn't thought of opening the lid to drain it. He was acting like he was going to be infected with a flesh eating bacteria or something. I TOLD him there was nothing in the bowl, except water, and all you might get is a little pink-eye, ha-ha. (In case you don't know – that's caused by fecal contamination.) He didn't think that was funny. As he went down the hall, he was still shouting, "WHAT were you thinking?" and et cetera. A while later I got up to do something and saw he'd thrown away the toothpaste

AND his toothbrush. So I had to ask, "What were YOU thinking? Like we can afford to throw away a perfectly good container of

toothpaste? AND your toothbrush, too? What will all Ransom's donors think of being so wasteful? And after we told them how hard times were?"

I don't know whether I should report what he said, but it was: "And EVERY time I FIND that toothpaste back on the shelf I WILL throw it away!"

So touchy! I told him *not* to touch it any more. The next day I bought him a new container of *Crest*. (I'll use up the old one myself.) The problem is that the

new one looks exactly like the old one, and in a few weeks (until he reads this) he'll forget. And with our memory problems, well, you can see where this might lead.

Unhappily, in my life there are other categories of lost and fallen. To me, flying is like entering another dimension; you leave the airport in Minneapolis and arrive at Hogwart's Castle with body and

mind intact. But when we flew to our annual board meeting in January, I lost my socks in that magical dimension. As we settled into our narrow little seats, I got hot. After adjusting

the air, removing several layers of clothing, and still feeling frantic, I took off my shoes and socks, leaving them on the floor beside my computer case. When we were about to land and I was re-dressing, I couldn't find my socks. Although we looked everywhere, they were gone. I decided not to worry because we landed in Phoenix where, what the hey, it's warm and the socks had holes in them anyway. But, still, I wonder, is it me? The universe? Or what?

Then there is my key ring with



Hogwarts castle

front door, back door, storm door and car keys that I *cannot* find. Unlike my cell phone which can be called from our landline to discover it's location, I can't do that with keys. So I retraced a week's worth of errands begging clerks and cashiers to check the Lost and Found. This happened while Denis was out of town with our car and I was borrowing Anita's second set of keys to drive *her* car. I thought mine were just bouncing around in my purse. I've thought about praying to find my keys, but Denis showed me a *New Yorker* cartoon where an angel appears at the window of an overweight, disheveled-looking man, kneeling beside his bed and announces: "Your prayers are freaking God out." I'm freaking myself out.

Three envies, possibly more

It may be risking more to be honest about who I am, but what do I have to lose? ha. I have more serious problems with breaking the Tenth Commandment: "Thou shalt not covet." In an excellent book on



There it is.

one Christian's search for humility, Bruce Ray Smith writes, "I admit to envy, a sin I deprecate in others and to which I had thought myself immune. Envy is a strain, a virulent strain, of pride: I should not be so surprised, so mortified to find myself infected." *Winter Light*, Kalos Press, p.17.

So I admit to you that my envies include the following:

A writing retreat house

(designed by architect Andrew Berman) posted on the internet caught my attention. It is aesthetically gorgeous with calm colors and tidy shelves. A wide, clean desk faces a wall-sized window overlooking a sunny woods. Right now the ceiling of the office where I write is leaking. I was out running errands when my husband heard a rhythmic plop, plop, plop-plop and investigated. Water was dripping onto my bookshelf, open dictionary, and a stack of papers. The ceiling is now drooping and stained the color of tobacco juice. Then I recalled a writer who wrote everyday from a tiny desk tucked into her small, dark



Andrew Berman Writing Retreat

closet that smelled like an old shoe.

I have a window that looks out on a lush linden tree. I have a small tapestry that softens the wall above my desk. The floor is honeyed-colored fir, and my messy L-shaped desk is large enough to host a sweet collection of giraffes. The bathroom is right next door. Bonus!

A nonprofit organization I admire celebrated their 20th anniversary this past year. When I heard that a couple of crack chefs were coming from far away to help cook a feast for the attendees, I blushed. What? Why didn't Ransom do something like that for their 20th Anniversary? Back then, Denis thought of splurging on a roll of *foil stickers* we could place on

envelopes announcing: Celebrating 20 Years! But wait, wasn't this our own failure of imagination? We had no energy or ambition to do more. Should friends be faulted for doing what they do so well – mentoring and launching gifted musicians and artists? Ransom's 30th anniversary is coming up next year. So? Margie? Never mind, I get where this is going.

Friends taking a trip to France sent secret waves of envy through



Giraffes on my desk

my heart. During grape harvest? Fromage fests? Café crème on the plaza? They are precious friends who have hosted us many times and spent countless hours loving us

through dark and fainting times. And last November, didn't I get, not only what what I needed, but what I wanted, after all? A quiet place on a lake without television or neighbors. A fireplace, windows to the sun, books, coffee and a good companion.

I should shut up because I can't talk myself out of every envy I feel. I don't want to be this kind of person. I don't want to be known by these ugly things, but for all the

wrong reasons. I'd like you to think I'm a better person than I am. More acceptable. Which is not at all what God has in mind. He wants to remake me. Again, Smith exposes where I'm at: "I want to be cured of the ills with which my pride afflicts me. But even without them, even freed from isolation, contempt and self-contempt, I will be no better. I still won't know how to live; I won't know, not here nor in heaven, how to be until I learn who I am, who I am

I'd like you
to think
I'm a better person.
More acceptable,
which is not at all
what God
has in mind.

now and who God meant, means, me to be.” *Winter Light*, p. 22.

Self-centered prayers get a little help

I forgot my Anglican prayer beads on the window sill at the cabin in Wisconsin. They were made by a friend; beautiful-jade and onyx. I sat at the window for morning prayer, looking out on the sky and lake, the chickadees darting to the feeder, snatching sunflower seeds. A great spot for contemplation. In the past, I would have gasped if you had suggested I use prayer beads. I thought they were as pagan as you could get. Repeating mumbled words. Fingering beads. Idolatry. Useless at best. Now, I’m sorry they will need to be replaced.

I’ll tell you why I use them now. Perhaps it’s my age, but I think I could have used their help a long time ago. I’ve always needed help with focus and clarity. My mind strays. No, that’s not true. Without an anchor it sails away with any excuse, on any whimsy. My prayers are far too self-centric. They are focused on my needs, my wants. “Dear God, help me be a better person so people will like me. Heal me. Give me a fun time. Give me safety when I travel. Help my finances and make my pillows

soft. If I had time to spare, I might pray for my husband and anyone close who was having a big problem.

To oppose this propensity to make self the center of the universe, I use the four sections of seven beads to help me pray in other ways for other people, with other needs than my own. So:

Prayers for others – I can’t begin to pray for all the needs of all people around the world, but in a finite way, I can pray for some. I often pray for unmarried friends because I don’t think it’s easy being either single or celibate in the culture of the American church. For people suffering under tyranny, war

and famine, I ask

God to spare

and comfort. I

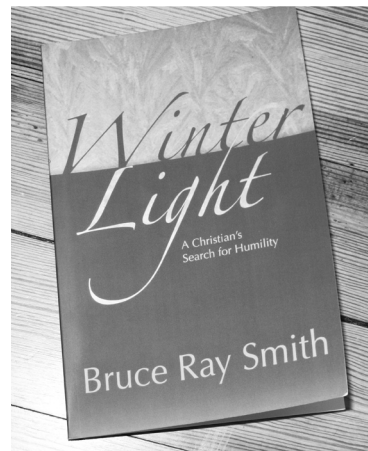
remember God who sees them all, and I, too, am comforted.

Prayers for family – immediate family.

There are always things to remember or give thanks for. Despite what we may present to

the world, who has a family that isn’t facing difficulty in some way? So sometimes a particular bead represents a particular person.

Prayers for self – seven whole



beads for all my causes, confessions and worries.

Prayers of thanksgiving and praise – for bringing his words to us through Scripture. For the men and women who wrote them down and were willing to

belong to him with all their great and pitiful lives, who were human and flawed, like me. For God being Trinity. I use that language: Thanks be to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The beads begin and end with the cross. And so, my prayers. I want to live, try to live, with this in mind – that God’s plan is to restore all things via the cross. That plan includes me. By it, one day, I’ll be resurrected, and then I’ll never lose my keys or slam a door. Nor will I envy, ever again.

[I ordered a new set from the Solitaires of de Koven. They’re made of African jasper beads; their earthy colors remind me that I, and those I love, are made of dust. Yet our days are numbered by a creator who loves his children and will take us home some day. There are many ways to use the Anglican prayer beads as an assist to prayer and meditation. Nothing sacred about how Margie does it.]

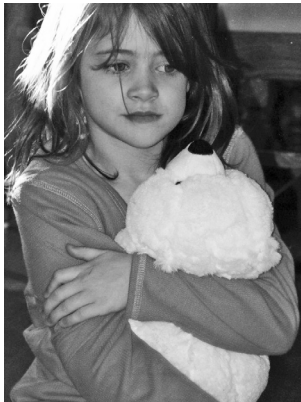


Anglican Prayer Beads

Family Notes



*The joy of sneaking
your mom's mascara.*



Ready for bed.



*Paige, Anson, & Ava ready to pass
the presents.*



The joy of dishes.



Ava's cat pajamas.

Jerem and family were here for Christmas. We hope memories of being at Grandpa and Grandma's are sticky and good. They were a "best" gift for us. Hard not to want to squeeze them all to death – wishing to spare them life's inevitable trials.

The Great Aunt remains healthy as her memory slips away. Moments of clarity are sweet reminders of who she is. Other moments are both distressing and hysterical. Recently as she returned from an outing, a friendly staff member invited her to watch Wheel of Fortune with them. The Aunt gave a withering glance and said severely, "Probably NOT." And then turned to Denis and Marsena, "What IS it with these people and WHEEL of FORTUNE?" Marsena protested, "But you've always liked word games and Wheel of Fortune." Without missing a beat The Aunt replied, "I know. I LOVE Wheel of Fortune."



*The Great Aunt works a
crossword.*

Ransom Notes

Ransom's Board Meeting

"Affection is responsible for nine-tenths of whatever solid and durable happiness there is in our lives." So wrote C. S. Lewis... so quoted Steven Garber, as he summarized our Board Meeting in January, writing...

My life is like that. Most of who I am, most of what I do, most of who I know, is deeply twined together with affection. It is why I see myself as Augustinian, in part. 1500 years ago he argued that "What do you love?" is the deepest of all questions, the question that forms us because its answer tells the most about us.

The last few days I have spent in the midst of people that I have long loved. From throughout the country, we are a small band really, but we have loved each other and loved the same vision for most of life. Out of this affection has grown two much-loved journals, "Critique" and "Notes From Toad Hall," edited by Denis Haack and Margie Haack, respectively – and whose affection for each other as husband and wife is a gift to all who know them.

Loving what we do

After all these years, it still isn't that easy to explain Ransom Fellowship in a sound bite. Our work and calling comes out of a desire to love and serve God well in this corner of his kingdom. Yet, like any of us, our lives are mixed with self-interest and great imperfection. Often, as Denis and I fall asleep together he murmurs to me, "I'm sorry." To my ears, that sounds like a too-general apology, and liking to pin it on a particular transgression, I ask "Could you be more specific?" So it is in this faltering way that we've kept on with Ransom Fellowship over the years: loving and failing to love. Imperfectly. With confession. Diligently working. Sometimes doubting and weary. And yet often, because so many of you have walked beside us, we are renewed with enough hope and help to keep going.

Our love is to help people think about and engage with the world around them. With neighbors and colleagues. With all facets of culture. We try to be a winsome model of redemption. Meaning, that the beauty and life of the Gospel are more than just "accept Jesus as your personal Savior." The Gospel compels us to live whole-er lives – to be unafraid and undaunted by views that are different or even opposite our own. The cross of Christ penetrates all things in life, from the infinite number of sins forgiven to praise for Honeysuckle's baby bunnies on the back porch that I watch for no other reason than that they have been created adorable. Jesus makes all things matter. This is part of what we so love about Christianity.

We write in a variety of venues, blog, host friends and strangers when we can, cook, lecture, communicate with folks in various ways. In a culture where efficiency and speed is greatly valued, our work is not an American business model, because it is inefficient, slow, and difficult to measure. Bob Goff of *Restore International* expresses this well: "When love is most extravagant, it's least wasted. Hope and love don't know what the word 'efficient' means." Thus, the practice of hospitality for the mind and body is both simple and lavish. It encompasses a spiritual reality that filters all of life.



Donald Guthrie, Denis, Margie



Honeysuckle's babies

Giving Thanks

God has done many things the past few months to keep us going. Some days were like sunshine and wine toasting our hearts. Others, not so. Still we believe, want to believe, his goodness at all times.

Financial. Last year was difficult for Ransom. Day by day we watched and prayed. Each gift that came seemed especially designed by God to ask, “Do you get this?” “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.” (Matt 10:29) One of the donations we received was from Clair-Hazel Electa, a 3rd grader, who sent one dollar and a drawing of a toad. Her letter “delited” us. At the end of December, there were enough funds for our Board to begin laying a budget for the coming year. To be sure, God will continue push the borders of our trust in him. Please pray for us to be faithful.



Anita & Margie

Ransom’s Assistant. We’ve been able to offer Anita a full-time position and we are grateful that she’s willing to share in the unpredictable nature of our faith ministry. Since we live side by side in spaces next to one another – she in Mole’s End, we in Toad Hall, we are a small community, working together, and accountable to our board. Anita’s work helps us manage our computer network and the everyday details of keeping up. She’s also owner of Honeysuckle, the angora rabbit, who’s become a media star of sorts. Together we see how these common human endeavors work to the glory of God.

Book Deal. After years of waiting: I’m knocked-down to have a book contract for a memoir, *The Exact Place*, with a young publisher: Kalos Press. I am proud to be with them. They’re publishers of *Winter Light* by Bruce Ray Smith – a beautiful, albeit, painful story of God’s humbling, healing work in his life. Stay tuned.

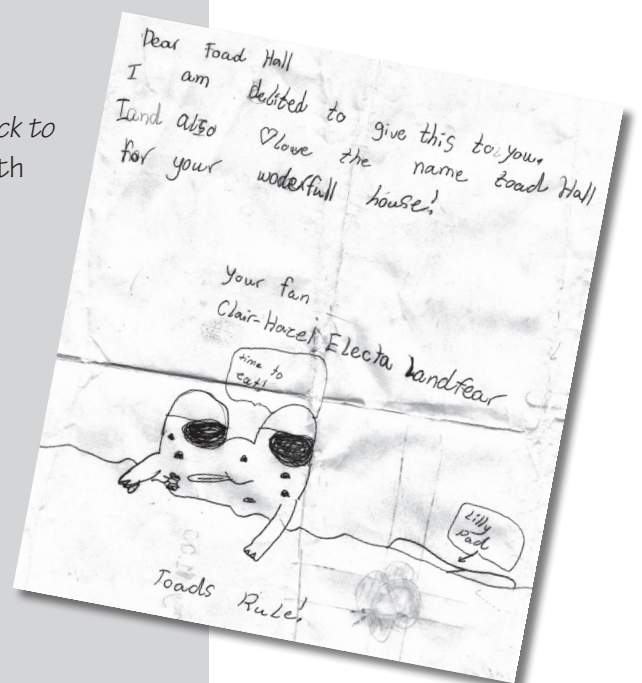
Coming Up

Feb. 10-12 Rochester L’Abri Conference. Denis: Plenary: *Back to the beginning: visions of creation in film*. Workshop: Interview with director Toddy Burton and premier of her new film short *The Miners*.

March 1 Chattanooga Christian School – chapel.

March 2-3 Chattanooga, TN, Denis gives workshop on Film & Literature for “The Cosmic Scope of Christ’s Redemption,” a conference sponsored by the Paideia Center for Theology (Ontario, Canada).

March 21-23 Memphis University School. Denis presents a faculty workshop, is a classroom guest, and Friday eve presents the Metcalf Symposium Lecture: *Bob Dylan: How his legacy has shaped our world*.



Final Notes

Ed Hague, one of our Board members, used to be a pastor. “Used to be,” is what some would say. But now more than ever he shepherds people, listening to their life stories as he does something he didn’t know he’d enjoy so much – helping people get the most from their Apple technology. Clients seem disarmed, unaware that the guy tweaking their iPads might be more than a really good technician. But three years ago, as he mourned what looked like the loss of his calling, it wasn’t all that obvious.

When our Board gathers, we spend time listening to one another. This year Ed posed that “we live in the tension between the amazing glory of living out of our callings and the stark reality of how difficult that is.” We stumble over lack of clarity. We want a plan. We stumble over suffering – over the loss of what we *thought* was our calling, and the fear that perhaps we made a fatal turn along the way.

Clinging to our callings often takes us on an inscrutable path. Though there are hints of glory along the way, for our taste, too much of it is labeled “not yet.” What God would have us know, in part, is that we haven’t been forsaken. We belong to him and to each other. He gives us a community that surrounds us. Many have come this way before and we belong to them. With them, we long to faithfully stay this path. Which is why, when we’re dying for want of clarity, we’re urged to fix our eyes on Christ, who mysteriously works for us as *author and perfecter* of our faith. (Heb. 12)

You don’t have a pastoring job with people you loved and had to leave; you don’t have a life-long invisible illness that affects you every hour of the day, so that you can’t always be announcing, sorry, I don’t feel well because my glucose levels are going nuts; and you can’t look financial ruin in the eye – without either going crazy or finding, against all odds, that Christ has so surrounded you with evidence of love exactly right here, on this very road, that you gladly count yourself as one of his. (Alright. There may be other options than going crazy.) My honor, I’m staying on the road right beside him.



Ed at Toad Hall



Wanting you to find Christ beside you, too,
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:

Ransom Fellowship

1150 West Center Street
Rochester, MN 55902

Or contact us

www.ransomfellowship.org

Follow Margie’s blog at

toadsdrinkcoffee.blogspot.com

Layout Editor: Anne Melnyk

Order Books from:



Distinctive Books and Music

234 East Main Street
Dallastown, PA 17313
(717) 246-3333

www.heartsandmindsbooks.com
read@heartsandmindsbooks.com

All books mentioned in *Notes from Toad Hall* may be ordered directly from Hearts and Minds. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to Ransom Fellowship.