

# Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 1 **Summer Into Fall 2014**



## Dear friends

I was told by a friend that I would need to eat an enormous amount of crow after moaning about down-sizing to a thousand square feet, but back in March I had no idea we were going to have more flexibility than we imagined. You may remember, we had just sold Toad Hall and were staggered that it was only on the market for three days, when we received four offers and all were more than our asking price. After much euphoria and relief we were immediately under pressure to *find* a place and get out by July.

Some of you will have no interest in this part of our story and that's okay. Come back later. But others of you think about your own changes and stages of life, and you know you

may need to move because of job changes, going back to school, financial considerations, illness, or aging; and you worry that God may not be with you on this journey because you are a doubter and you have put off decisions you should have made long ago; so you might well be on your own, buddy. This is merely one story of change – our witnessing God’s kindness and provision to two people, three when we include Anita – despite being imperfect in many ways.

## Selling

We knew a little about the buyers and our hearts were greatly warmed, because we prayed someone would own it and love it like we did. On a spring day after it sold, when the tulips were in bloom, we met the buyer’s parents as they walked past our yard. They told us they had moved into our neighborhood in 1997 when their daughter was still in high school. They often passed our house and she always said, “I love that house. Someday I want it to be mine.” She had never seen the inside, but our windows were often lit up and passersby could see the warm colors, coffee mugs on the rack and artwork on the walls. Maybe that was part of what drew her. She grew up, left home, married, had children of her own, lived in a nearby town and when our “For Sale” sign went up, her parents immediately called her. She

quickly called our agent and said, “I want that house no matter the price!” Her husband was fine with



*Toad Hall has a new owner.*

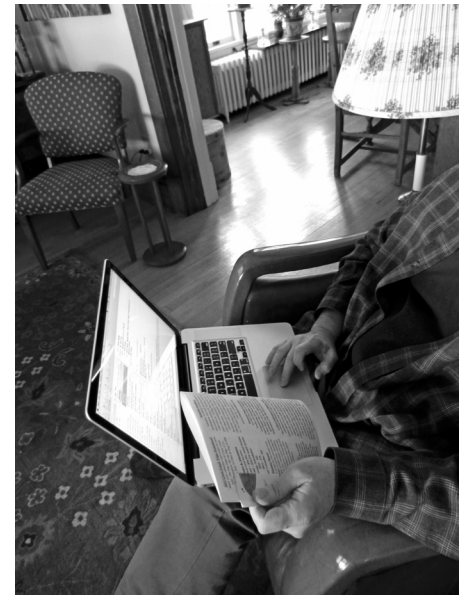
the idea since he works for Mayo and the location was convenient for work, for nearby grandparents, and (bonus!) Mole’s End could be a place for the husband’s mother to live. We listened to this remarkable story and could hardly believe that in some small (big to me) way, God had prepared this woman from the time she was a girl to be in the right place with the right finances to buy our home at the right time. It delights us to know it will be a place for another family to enjoy.

## Searching

In February, we had begun looking throughout the Metro area – educating ourselves about real estate and thinking about townhomes versus stand-alone houses. After comparing, it seemed like a stand-alone would work better for us. The cost of monthly association fees is high and although the exterior, landscaping and snow

removal are taken care of, we felt as we grew older, hiring those services would be more affordable on a fixed income. Also when we figured in the space we hoped to have for writing offices – three-bedroom townhomes were immediately out of our price range. We know it can be a different scenario for others, but these were our reasons.

So we plunged into the dark abyss of real estate marketing, spending hours and hours sorting through dozens and dozens of houses online where often the photos



*Denis searching, searching, searching...*

and descriptions had *nothing* to do with reality. We got so sick of it, sometimes we could barely turn on the computer without snarling. The market moved so fast we had to drive up to the Cities several



times a week, often to find that in the hours before we arrived, what we only wanted to *look* at was sold. Or we'd arrive at an address that looked perfect on paper to find it was next to a Costco parking lot. Every week I talked about giving up our non-negotiables, (like a quiet neighborhood) and Denis would say no, let's keep praying and waiting.

## Finding

On April 11th we found a house that looked a little boring on the outside, but the inside bloomed with potential. It was in our price range on a quiet street and backed up to a 46 acre park. It had a main floor bedroom, bath and laundry – good for old folks who can't climb stairs as body parts begin to fail. At the back of the house was a beautiful sunroom with large windows on three sides, perfect for my office, almost like being in a tree house. Right above it on the 2nd floor was its exact twin. Who would build a house with *two* sunrooms? It had less square footage than Toad Hall, but felt more spacious because of the open floor plan and the second floor loft with a library area that overlooked the fireplace and living room. We walked around thinking, how perfect is this?! Our agent, surprised that it was still on the market, kept looking for the big flaw, saying, "I

can't see *anything* wrong with this house! It just has to be under the radar!" Or, perhaps, we thought, shielded from other eyes by God's providence? We immediately wrote an offer and confident that it would be ours, on the way back to Rochester we stopped for to dinner to celebrate. The next day we got the call: Offer rejected. The



*A condo we could afford.*

irony of us jumping the gun to celebrate nothing made us feel glum and discouraged.

We learned that another buyer had been low-balling the sellers but when he heard we made a higher offer, he quickly came in above ours. We were back to square one. So we kept on looking and finding nothing. Our board members tried to encourage us. Donald Guthrie said, "Just because the sellers accepted another offer doesn't mean it won't fall through. I'm praying it will." Ed Hague had another opinion: "You haven't suffered enough and I didn't like the front of the house anyway." (He was joking. I think.) Day after

day Denis kept repeating, "But that house is *ours*, don't they *know* that?!" He-who-never-dreams, even had a dream that the house belonged to us. I wanted to believe it was prophetic. He kept praying the deal would fail and maintaining that we needed to wait and see, while I prepared for worst-case-scenarios.

## Buying

Three weeks later we heard from our agent. The house was back on the market after the inspection and the potential buyers had backed out. We resubmitted our offer. The next day it was rejected again because the buyers had repented and decided to go ahead. Argh! Two days later our agent called

*again*. He told us the listing agent was so embarrassed she made her husband call him to ask if those people from Rochester would consider coming in again, because, once again, the sale was off and the sellers were now so mad at the other party they weren't going to sell to the "buyers from hell" no matter what they offered. So once more we were ready to go and this time it worked. The house was ours! This time we celebrated with thanksgiving and huge sighs of relief. No time for frivolous dinners now, because suddenly the new closing date of May 30th was coming up smoking fast.

Speaking of smoking, our house is in Savage, MN, a little community just south of the Twin Cities. Savage makes us think of burning and pillaging. I am Norwegian, and after all, my ancestors the Vikings, were pretty good at this.

## Moving

Some have asked why the Twin Cities. Why not stay in Rochester? One reason this location pleases our family is that it makes us a little more central and a little easier for our kids to visit. That's really important when we look down the road at a time when we *may* need more care. Jerem & Micah come to the Cities quite often. More now that Anson is in hockey and has tournaments in the area (yea!). Sember and Shaun must come from far away, but visiting Shaun's nearby family hasn't been easy because they own cats and Shaun is so severely allergic to them he can't go into their houses, so we are delighted to keep them here while they split their days.

Another reason to be here is that Denis' elderly parents are in Minneapolis and we would like to be more involved in their care.

We hired a local moving company to load and unload us. The owner was young, but experienced. Maybe not experienced enough, though. He gave us a ridiculously low estimate and thought it might take four hours and two trucks to load. It took three trucks and nine hours, and oh, it was a hot,

humid day. On the way to Savage one of his trucks broke down and had to be towed back to Rochester, unloaded and reloaded and brought to us the next day. Thankfully, our beds were in one of the trucks that did arrive. The crew was wonderful; it was a pleasure to keep them hydrated and fed with pizza. I've completely forgotten what it is like to have enough energy at the end of a long day that you could bounce up the ramp, randomly jump up to hit a strap hanging from the roof of the truck, pick up two boxes of



*We've never had a fireplace, until now.*

crafts – filled with her supplies and tools – that one of them asked, “So, Anita works for you right? Do you pay her money or do you just give her Hobby Lobby gift certificates?”

## The House Between

The House Between is not so photogenic on the outside as Toad Hall. It has more of an inner beauty as the space opens up inside and draws you in. Each morning I step out of our bedroom look across the kitchen, past the dining room, and see my office lit up as the rising sun shines across the room. We look out the back of the house onto a canopy of trees and a wooded ravine that rises up to our backyard and long stretches of grass on either side. On certain days we can hear the stream that bubbles and flows through the valley down below. There is carpet in many rooms, even the dining area – who would do that? – but I'm surprised to enjoy padding quietly about. The wide staircase is carpeted in



*The House Between*

books weighing 50 pounds each and carry them into the house. So many boxes were labeled Anita's



contrast to our oak stairs at Toad Hall where not even the stealthiest visitor could creep up because they creaked and groaned on every step. I could easily sneak up on Denis in his office and scare him half to death, but I won't. Even though we live *Savage*, I really am a Reformed Viking.

It has been such a gift – the beauty, the way the house functions, its layout, the peacefulness. The atmosphere is sort of cabin-y – with a restful, restorative feel. Every day we recognize

God's hand in the way things unfolded; all this grace poured out despite my doubts of ever finding something we would love. Every day we thank Him for some new thing we hadn't noticed. Flower beds that need weeding, yes, but full of potential. Birds that sing like crazy. All the utility lines are buried. Not once has a helicopter thundered over. There is no traffic in this court. In fact, late one night the lights of a car flashed through our bedroom and I got up to see what that was all about! We are seeing wildlife. Deer. Turkeys. Birds at our feeder. Even saw a fox curled up on the driveway one morning. Sadly, it was not well. Poor thing was dying of mange and had even lost the

fur off her tail. She was so skinny we thought of calling our house "Gaunt Fox Hollow" as a joke against all the "Fox Run" names of streets and neighborhoods that developers come up with.

I have wondered how to write this issue of *Notes From Toad*

*Hall* which will now be *Letters from the House Between*, and how to report on all this. Please understand that our story is not meant to be a standard, as if you pray, wait and be thankful, then God will then give you what you want. If I'm

not careful that may be how it sounds. He gives to his children, not based on good attitude, (mine is almost always lacking) or good work (very spotty in my case) but He gives according to his plans and purposes so that we may learn how better to love and serve Him.

This morning about 5 a.m. I listened to the din of bird song. Not just one or two robins, and a single cardinal outside our window but a multitude. Birdsong I didn't recognize like the little two-part squeak, repeated over and over. We feel uncommonly blessed. To

have so much behind us allows me to feel free. I anticipate this stage – the people, a church we love and quiet with more space in which to write.

So here I sit in my office with no excuses. The sun streams in from the east. Coffee beside me. I know the word that wants out. Unclench.



*Gaunt Fox Lane*

## Psalm 65

By awesome deeds  
you answer us with  
righteousness, O God of  
our salvation, the hope  
of all the ends of the  
earth and of the farthest  
seas...those who dwell  
at the ends of the earth  
are in awe at your signs.  
You make the going out  
of the morning and the  
evening to shout for joy...  
you crown the year with  
your bounty; your wagon  
tracks overflow with  
abundance. The pastures  
of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves  
with joy, the meadows  
clothe themselves with  
grain, they shout and sing  
together for joy.

Psalm 65: 5, 8, 11-13. (ESV)

# RansomNotes

## Settling into the writing life

As we settle into The House Between and focus on writing, we want to become more disciplined and intentional with our writing habits. We need to protect space and time for that and we certainly have the perfect environment – the quietness and the beauty – where it can happen. Both of us have manuscript possibilities. If age helps you gain anything (like wisdom?) it might help us connect with others, hopefully. We don't want to become stagnant, but wish to continue growing even where it hurts. We have fewer responsibilities in our new community and plan to consider carefully how we might fit in before jumping to warp speed. We should have no excuses for not writing. So



*Denis' office*

where is that master piece? Huh? Denis has several projects he has worked on for a long time. He needs to complete them before they grow stale to him. Sometimes as a writer, I am like the artist who doesn't know when to quit, but keeps adding elements until the painting looks like a rendition of "Where's Waldo." Both of us struggle with our unique brands of perfectionism that can derail us. So even though everything that surrounds me in this place should be conducive to creative, uninterrupted progress, I am here. I am the problem, I cannot escape myself. We would appreciate prayers for this part of our life – that we would truly be faithful in our every-day calling. That we would be used of God to serve others in this way.

## IRS casts a long shadow

Would you please pray that their issues would be resolved? For months now the IRS has been sending Ransom threatening letters. They continue to claim that Ransom is not in compliance regarding a certain document that a non-profit needs to send them. Even though we have proof that this document was sent to them, (actually sent in twice!) and even though we have a receipt showing they received it, and in addition, a local agent looked at all the documentation and said everything had been done correctly – "the agency has made a mistake in pursuing you with fines" – they continue to come after us. The agent could not assure us that their computer system would correct this mistake. And sure enough, they have continued to send us letters, now telling us that our case is so complicated they need more time to resolve it, *but* if we want to begin paying our fine and the interest that is accruing daily, they'd be happy to receive our money. We are in the third 60-day extension period they have granted themselves and are waiting and hoping they will drop the fine and correct their records to show we are in compliance. If they rule against us, they can freeze Ransom's accounts anytime they choose. Would you join us in prayer about this – that we won't let this rule our hearts and minds and that it would be settled?

## Prayers and Petitions

- Pray that this new home would be a place of safety and welcome, although we may not be hosting as much as we used to.
- Give thanks for *The House Between* and pray we would be open to ways of serving the Lord with what we've been given.
- Pray for our writing projects – for discipline, creativity and wisdom. That I would be able to make the deadlines for a manuscript of *Notes from Toad Hall* essays.
- Pray that the IRS would stop harassing us. Please, dear God.
- Pray that as fall approaches, God would lead us to the right venues for participating in speaking and travel, as He wills.

# Family Notes

Not long after we moved to Savage, Sember and her family arrived for a ten-day visit. At the same time Jerem and his family came down for three days so we could all be together for a continuous soiree. We were full up with seventeen people spread out on every floor. It was a grand christening that filled our house with joy. Our cul de sac rang with kick-ball, tag, and mock fights. Seven children under the age of eleven create enough noise to drown out the Indy 500. Our neighbors probably thought a troop of monkeys had moved in next door.

Anson had a hockey tournament that weekend and it gave his cousins a chance to attend a hockey game for the first time in their lives. It was a sweet thing when his team won the championship for their division.

Honeysuckle has become an indoor basement bunny. Too many predators are interested in her and the raccoons have been peering through the windows at night to scare her. She thumped her alarms until Anita hung a blanket over the glass doors.

Our yard holds many interesting surprises. Anita was out trimming the old lilacs and decided the twisty limbs would make an interesting bohemian bed frame. Who knew? I'm sure you'll want one, too, when she's done.



*L to R. Elisha, Manessah, Ava Lou (in front), Anson, Mason, Kaiden, Isobel, Paige*



*Pig pile on Grandpa*



*Boy cousins*



*Honeysuckle, the Basement Bunny*



*Lilac limbs for a bed*



# And Finally...

## Why The House Between?

When Denis and I travel, we often have long, uninterrupted periods of talking and thinking together. Sometimes it's the perfect venue for miles of marathon quarreling where we cross state lines and still can't escape one another. This especially happens – I mean the good parts – when we drive to Chattanooga from Minnesota. During a trip last year we discussed the changes that would come if we moved from Toad Hall; that's when it dawned – I wouldn't be writing *Notes From Toad Hall* anymore. It would need to be called something new.

As we passed through Kentucky and over the dams that bind the great southern rivers – the Ohio and the Cumberland, a land emerges between the bridges; land bordered on all sides by water. It is simply called "The Land Between the Lakes."

That was when the idea came: Our next home would be similarly bound by the years between the time when we raised our children, continued our ministry of Ransom Fellowship, grew older and the time that now merges into what may become our last stage of life. It is the place, the home between what was past and the future that is yet to come. It is *The House Between*.

In the *Harry Potter* series there is an invisible house that can't be seen by the neighbors. 12 Grimmauld Place isn't perfect, being dusty and old, but it is safe. A home temporarily protected from affliction and adversity. A place of recovery where the weary can rest awhile.

Perhaps, that is a little of what we have here in the quiet, green of a neighborhood I never imagined living in – the American cul de sac! I'm already tempted to become too fond of this place. Denis too, who said over and over again that he wanted to be buried with his books in the basement of Toad Hall – "Pull my bookshelves over me and fill it with cement," now he says, "If I'd known how great this would be, I'd have moved ten years ago!"

A friend reminds us, "All of this is just a foretaste of the glory we were made for in Christ and what is still to come."

*Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.* —C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*



Until then,

Margie Haack

## About Letters From the House Between

If you drive through western Kentucky where two great southern rivers – the Cumberland and the Ohio – come together, you pass over the dams that bind them and a land emerges bordered on all sides by water, simply called The Land Between the Lakes. As we drove, we thought about the changes coming as we aged and needed to move from Toad Hall, our home of thirty-three years. We needed a place where certain features were on the main floor so as body parts fail one doesn't need to climb stairs to reach them. We thought of that place as "The House Between," a place bound on one side by years past where we raised children, continued our ministry and grew older, and on the other side, a place in heaven where God holds a perfect place of restoration yet to come. Our new home is a reminder that this is only a "place between" what is now and what will one day be true Home forever. Thus: The House Between.

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