

# Notes from TOAD HALL

Issue #1 - 2003  
Still Winter



**M**“Margie Lou,” my husband said. He calls me that sometimes, even though I do not like it. Margie Lou. It’s too like Elly Sue. Or Kootchy Koo. But I tolerate it from him. He calls me that when he is trying to get my attention in a crowd or when he wants to give me advice. This time it was advice. “Margie Lou, you should just never use bleach.” I was getting ready for bed and he was looking at my socks which at one time matched. But now one was black and the other a grayed brown.

“I think anything that you need bleached, you should just take over to your friend Peggy’s house. In a little basket. Leave it on the

doorstep. She can bleach whatever needs bleaching and you can bring her a meal or something in exchange." I guess it wasn't only my socks that reminded him of this little problem. It was the first time in three months I had worn a particular pair of pants and he was thinking I needed to develop a better sense of where I am especially in regard to bleach.

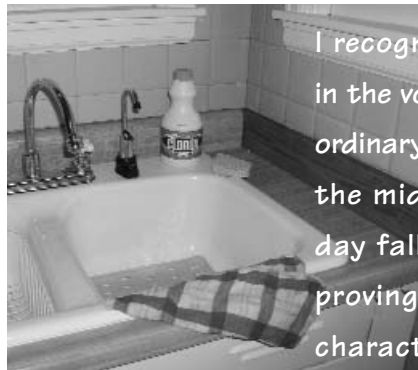
### Where's the Bleach?

These pants are a little allegory of life. Of things going quite wrong when you forget the tiniest thing about where bleach is located. It began last summer when my sister, Roxanne, and I walked into a used clothing store where people lucky enough to own them sell last year's fashions at a reduced rate. I found a pair of teal blue linen overalls with the original price tag still on them—\$97. Never worn. I bought them for \$19. Which is still more than my frugal sister would pay, but a pretty good deal for me.

The first time I wore them, I leaned against the kitchen sink having just soaked the dishcloth in bleach. Somehow I got a splotch of it right across my middle. I was so dismayed—because of my history of accidents and having vowed I would never let such a thing happen again—I just took them off and tried to forget them for a few weeks.

When I got them out again I tried to complete the bleaching process by soaking them (very carefully) in very strong bleach for a very long time. After rinsing them, I could see all I had done was fade them to an ugly green with white slashes across the middle. I decided to bleach again with really hot water in the washing machine. That time they came out a uriney yellow with white spots.

That's when I learned the Ritz Dye Company sells something called Undye or Color-Out (\$3.69 a package). Ideally you have to mix it in boiling water. On the stove. Put the garment in a huge stock pot and keep it near boiling for an hour. Then, wa-la, it should be white. A light straw color with white spots was good enough for me. Ritz actually had a color close to the original, so I bought a package of Sea



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Green (\$3.69 a package), but when I dyed them, the pants came out a shade of bile that reminded me of stomach flu.

I decided to call the Ritz Company and talk to an expert. Gretchen consulted a color chart and said, "To make it teal blue you need to mix one package of Royal Blue with one and a half packages of Forest Green (\$11.07). Use the hottest water possible in your machine and agitate it for one hour." So I did. Even though it required standing in the laundry room resetting the wash cycle every ten minutes. Finally, rinsed and dried, I pulled them out. They were the color of dead algae.

After three months of hiding them in my closet again, I said, "Forget Teal Blue" and purchased another package of Royal Blue (\$3.69. Total now \$37.45, not counting cost of bleach, electricity, water, and labor) and repeated the whole washing machine thing again. This time it worked.

As we were getting ready to go out one evening, I put them on. I should have known. All that hot

water. They had shrunk from nearly touching the floor to just above my ankle bone, which might be a fashionable length for some, but made me look like I'd had an unusually late growth spurt.

Suddenly I recognized myself in the vortex of an ordinary process—the middle of everyday fallen life, the proving ground for character. The process Paul talks about in Romans 5. So quelling the urge to set them on fire, I calmly ripped out the cuffs, scotch-taped the hems, and wore them to dinner that night.

### Where's the Target?

Last November an 89-year-old man from around here went deer hunting. That is, he sat on his back porch with a rifle looking out over brush and field. He shot at what he thought was a deer about 180 yards away, which isn't too far for a hunter. I mean, it is no great feat to say: I shot this deer at 180 yards. Hitting a deer at two hundred yards, the length of two football fields, garners a little more respect among hunters, especially if it's on the run. But I digress. The guy hit it, and the deer turned out to be a girl on a horse and the horse took it in the shoulder. The bullet just missed the girl's leg. The man was extremely sorry. He apologized up and down and paid for the vet bills. The horse will live, but it probably won't be ridden again.

I once saw a director's outtake of *Alien Resurrection* where Lt. Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) was resurrected as a powerful human clone. They had a shot of her working out in the gym with a basketball. She was supposed to do an over the shoulder backward shot and hit the basket. She wanted to do it herself without a stunt double or any trickery. She tried and tried for hours and hours and could not hit it. At the very end, and you could see the whole crew was getting pretty fed up with it, she finally gave up. But as a last disgusted

gesture on her way out of the gym she threw the ball over her shoulder. It was a swisher. Everyone was shocked and then broke out in cheers.

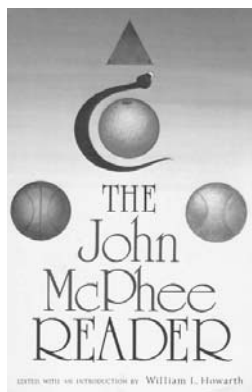
Later, I ran across a passage in *The John McPhee Reader* about basketball player Bill Bradley (1960's) who did this all the time from anywhere in the court. You know. Within reason.

*He moves in rapidly parallel to the baseline, glides through the air with his back to the basket, looks for a teammate he can pass to, and, finding none, tosses the ball into the basket over one shoulder, like a pinch of salt. Only when the ball is actually dropping through the net does he look around to see what has happened, on the chance that something might have gone wrong... that shot has the essential characteristics of a wild accident, which is what many people stubbornly think they have witnessed until they see him do it for the third time in a row. He [Bradley] went on to say that it is a much simpler shot than it appears to be, and, to illustrate, he tossed a ball over his shoulder and into the basket while he was talking and looking me in the eye. I retrieved the ball and handed it back to him. "When you have played basketball for a while, you don't need to look at the basket when you are in close like this," he said, throwing it over his shoulder again and right through the hoop. "You develop a sense of where you are."*

[Emphasis mine.] pp. 4-5.

I mention these things not because I love tidy little morals at the end of stories—though I kinda do, sometimes—but because half the time I walk around forgetting where I am, taking pot shots or

throwing the ball wildly over my shoulder, and either hitting the wrong thing or missing altogether. And when something reminds me, I mean *really* reminds me, so hard of where I am that it grips me and makes me speechless for a minute or two. Then I think maybe I'm not alone and there are probably others out there who forget, too. And who need to hear again that life isn't just a mix of meaningless bleach accidents or terrifying mistakes with wild shots over the shoulder that sometimes score. Rather, a life of faith ought to be more like a Bill



**Life isn't just a mix of meaningless bleach accidents or terrifying mistakes with wild shots over the shoulder that sometimes score.**

Bradley shot. Assured. Practiced. A knowing exactly where you are.

### Where's Sleep?

Not too long ago I lay awake at night trying to find sleep. I know dozens of remedies for insomnia. But once I get to thinking about certain things, no amount of warm milk or Yoga Sleeping Baby positions is going to put me to bed. I had dozens of reasons to stay awake envisioning the darkest outcomes for life.

Scripture has a way of grounding me wherever I am, and that time I thought about Mark 4 (see also Luke 8) when Jesus suggests he and the disciples sail across the Galilee. Simple enough. They take off across the lake and just when they are too far from either shore to make for safety (how like God), a huge storm suddenly blows down the Jordan River gorge.

I was once caught in a storm with my grandfather, who was an

experienced sailor. To keep up his courage, he whistled and sang above the roar as he tried to steer us behind an island. As the waves crashed over the bow, I heard him ask Ronnie Sandy, an Ojibwa guide who worked for him and a better swimmer, if he would get me to shore if we went down. So I can imagine this scene.

Anyway, it turns out that Jesus had fallen asleep on a cushion in the stern. Exhausted, he continues to sleep through the roaring wind and pounding waves! Although seasoned sailors are among them, when the boat starts to fill with water the disciples think they are going to die. Grown men don't like to feel this afraid and I think maybe they're a little annoyed that their leader is snoozing in the back without even the decency to show a little concern. They wake him and say (I think they yelled), "DON'T YOU CARE THAT WE ARE PERISHING?"

As in: What's wrong with you?

Jesus gets up, speaks a word, and immediately it is calm. As anyone knows who's been on a lake in a storm, waves don't just immediately go flat once the storm has passed; it takes awhile. But it was perfectly still. The surface of a mirror. In all that quietness, Jesus says to them: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40)

Here's my shot. I'm in the boat with Jesus. This storm is very bad. It doesn't look good. Everyone says so. But Jesus is asleep. I look at him so tired and so comfortable despite the tossing of the boat and the shrieking of the wind. I wish I could rest too. Though it seems wildly inadvisable, I should lie down beside him and go to sleep in perfect peace. Because. Because if the creator of all that is can sleep through a storm like this, then so can I. And what if we capsizes? Then we'll go down *with him* and from there he will rescue us.

This is having a true sense of where you are. More precisely, it is having a sense of who you are with.

### Pot Shots

As the knowledge of who God is has grown, rather than causing humility and worship—which it ought to do—I can get arrogant (sigh), thinking I am truly an inside partner with God and can interpret and predict what is going on in others’ lives based on something as small as a look. From time to time God reminds me how absolute is my error. Of how little I know of him and his work. Had I been beside him throughout history I would have needed constant interpretation to catch the smallest thing. In fact, I found this letter of apology written two years ago to someone who will remain anonymous.

**From time to time God reminds me of how little I know him and his work. Had I been beside him throughout history I would have needed constant interpretation to catch the smallest thing.**

Dear [     ],

Can you to forgive me for what I thought and said the other day? Sometimes we think we have God’s insight and we’re not even close. I thought about how many times I would have misinterpreted people and events of Scripture if I’d been there. Sort of like this:

#### What I Saw

Cain’s offering and it looked good to me.

Delilah caressing Samson and thought she was true.

Hannah praying and thought she was a drunk.

Potipher’s wife with Joseph’s coat and thought she’d been assaulted.

David dancing and thought he was nuts.

Mary pregnant and knew she’d been sleeping around.

Paul crying and thought he was depressed.

Judas with the Twelve and thought he was holy.

Jesus dead and obviously it was over.

*These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to*



*your face. (Ps 50: 21)*

Some of what’s been going on in your life in the past weeks have caused me to reflect on how often we humans come to the wrong conclusion. Sometimes it is based on what we think we see. We so totally don’t get what God is doing. Other times it is merely because our hearts are wicked and we choose to see, hear, believe, and repeat things that are not true. And sometimes when we tell what we think we see, the waves we set in motion really wound people. Can you forgive me for doing this to you?

I think about the above Scripture: “YOU thought I was altogether like you. But I will REBUKE you for thinking that.” God has rebuked me for thinking He and I are on the

same page. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I look at the course of life, its many events that are strange, terrible, crazy, some too awful to think about, and I can even cry, thinking, “If I were you, God, I would certainly do things differently.” But God isn’t anything like me. I know this more the older I get.

So what do we do about a God so different from ourselves? Can we trust him? It might seem crazy to stay a Christian if we couldn’t look at the lives of some of the people mentioned above. But we have their stories and in each there is a mercy revealed from God at some point along the way. There aren’t always full explanations, but there is a revealing of God’s tenderness and love placed upon those who turn to him. He does lift up the head of those who are hurting. He does pursue those who stray. And the reason Jesus didn’t stay dead is because God so thoroughly loves us.

Anyway. Thank God He knows and helps you in a way I never could. I love you and hope you will give me a chance to see you better with the eyes of Jesus.

Lovingly,

[     ] ~

# Ransom Notes

## Looking Back

**January.** We have many reasons to thank God as we look back over the last few months. Our Board meeting in mid-January went well. It is always encouraging to be with these dear friends who help direct and evaluate our ministry. There were no big changes in our overall direction, only that Denis' travel and speaking schedule will continue to be somewhat reduced as he works on a seminary degree. The board approved the purchase of a new computer which will help Denis edit clips from films and make it easier to include them in his lectures. It is difficult to stay current with technology and we generally keep things until there is no software that can read it and no technicians alive who remember the product. So this was good news.

A few days after the Board met, we left for St. Louis where Denis took another course at the seminary. He feels quite guilty for loving the work so much. This time it was a Bible Applications seminar on hermeneutics taught by Dr. Dan Doriani. That completed his third course and he was relieved to report to the children that he passed.

While we were in St. Louis we each lectured at Border's for the Francis Schaeffer Institute. It tweaks my brain to give a talk in a public setting where anyone can drop in to listen; you have to make sure you're addressing not the churched, but those who may be far from Christ and Christianity.

**February 18-22, Orlando, Fl.** Denis presented workshops at "Connect," a national conference sponsored by Youth In Ministries Institute—a department of Covenant Seminary. Aimed at youth pastors and directors, 300 PCA youth workers and spouses attended. Denis' topic "Ministering in Babylon: Reflecting Christ in a Strange Land" was well-received and elicited questions and fruitful discussion. His goal was to help them think about and find practical ways to connect with the postmodern generation, to understand popular culture as a window of insight reflecting their deepest concerns and to engage them with the Gospel in the midst of this culture.

Among the attendees at "Connect," three main questions kept rising with such similar words that Denis was able to summarize them this way:

1. How can we help parents understand that sheltering is not the main goal of parenting? While it is appropriate to think for children when

**February 7 and 8, L'Abri Conference in Rochester.** If you are interested in ordering tapes, [www.soundword.com/labri2003r.html](http://www.soundword.com/labri2003r.html) lists the plenary sessions and workshops along with an order form.

The speakers touched on an astonishing array of excellent topics. From music (Bill Edgar's "The True Story of Afro-American Spirituals") to literature ("Glimpses of Grace in Modern Literature" by Marsena Konkle). And from hospitality (Joe Morrell's "Deconstructing Designer Hospitality") to healing (Alison McGregor's "The Struggle Between Shame and Grace").

After Denis' lecture "Grace in the Dark: God's Glory and the Films of Babylon" where he used clips from the movies *Wit* and *13 Conversations About One Thing*, many went out and bought their own copies, having found that these films speak profoundly to life and truth.

Some of the comments we consistently heard at the conference were:

"I had no idea how to live in this world, understand it, and still be an effective communicator of the gospel. This conference gives me hope that it's possible."

"I didn't know Christians could appreciate the beauty created by non-Christians and not compromise their faith."

"Once a year I come here to get challenged and fed in areas of life that my church doesn't address. There is so much to think about it's like trying to drink from a fire hydrant."

"You really made me think. I'm going to take another look at that [fill in the blank with book, music, movie, author]."

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[www.ransomfellowship.org](http://www.ransomfellowship.org)

they are young, how do we help parents think with them when they are older? There was a sense of frustration among attendees that parents are naive about what their kids, even sheltered kids, have been exposed to and about the need to thoughtfully engage culture with the truth of God's word.

2. How can we help church leaders and parents have more confidence in the power of the Gospel and to stop being so afraid of the world, of thinking that contact means losing their

children? Many pastors and directors said their main job description was to provide an alternative social life for young people, so that the Christian young person can exist in three worlds: the Christian family, the Christian school, and the church youth group. And if successful? Kids shouldn't need to touch the real world.

3. *How can we help church leaders and parents not get hung up on superficials which reflect the tendency to see sin as residing in things not the human heart? For example, one said, 'I have senior high school students preparing to go on short term missions but their parents do not trust them to see a movie that has the f-word, no matter how relevant or thoughtful the film.'*

There was a deep longing among them to see this generation reached for the glory of God. To see young people enthralled with the power and beauty of God's word and the life of Christ. And to see our times and our culture as a mission field where we are unafraid to love the people and to know and understand their stories, which is where communicating the Gospel begins.

This is a long report, but it is at the heart of what we feel called to do with Ransom. It was encouraging and exciting to see these issues taken seriously.

## Coming Up

**April 3-7, Angelfire, NM.** Annually a group of six couples take a weekend for intense Bible Study and discussion, choosing to look into all sorts of cultural topics in order to examine and apply Scripture to our lives, our families, our churches.

**May 17-June 1, Camp Red Cloud, Colorado.** A project run by Greg Grooms from the PROBE Center in Austin, Texas. A group of college students comes away for a time of study and rest. We join them to help with cultural discernment issues, exploring together the problems and challenges of living faithfully as Christians in a pagan culture. We eagerly spend this extended time with post-modern students hoping to learn and listen to their hearts.

## Website

We have waited four years for the right time and enough funding to get a website going. Just prior to our board meeting, Marsena launched it, giving board members a chance to see it and give feedback. It felt like we should have a celebration and break a bottle of champagne over the computer or something. Marsena has done a great job of designing and getting all the parts up and working. She has posted many articles and series from *Critique*, movie reviews, discussions, and discernment exercises. Shaun, our son-in-law, was commissioned to paint a work of art for the opening page—one that reflects something of what Ransom is about. We really like the way it turned out. Each month more pages are added. Eventually more issues of *Notes From Toad Hall* will be posted, too. We hope this will add to the accessibility of our ministry. Visit us at [www.ransomfellowship.org](http://www.ransomfellowship.org) and give us your feedback. We'd love to hear from you. ✠

# F Family Notes

## This Is Not the Bunny Hill

I am writing this on March 8 and my calendar reminds me that today was Sember's due date. But the twins, Elisha and Kaiden have already been here four weeks. They've sorta stolen the family spotlight the last few months, having first caused their mom to be on complete bed rest and then for arriving early on February 8.

The week before they were born I returned home from helping Sember, who was on bedrest, just in time for the Rochester L'Abri conference. The next day, Sember went into the hospital feeling more dead than alive because she'd been sleepless and in 'disorganized' labor for three days. Many people prayed for them and on Saturday night at about eight-thirty, the babies were safely delivered fifteen minutes apart and weighing five pounds thirteen ounces and six pounds four ounces. Elisha and Kaiden are both doing well.

They are beautiful. Amazing. Probably identical, but already they demonstrate unique differences in personality. I know that's hard to believe if you think babies do no more than cry, eat, sleep, and create mountains of used diapers and dirty laundry. Okay. I admit they can cry a lot. Sometimes



Kaiden and Eli LaRose



Sember kissing Kaiden. Or is it Eli?



piggy-backing on one another to make it all night.

Sember looks and feels better than she has for months; she's recovered much of her old spirit which makes us all rejoice. But still. How long can one go without sleep? I've stayed with them off and on this past month (Bringing sound machine and ear plugs. Well? Either I sleep or I go home.) and I marvel at God's provision and plan for their family—many friends have sent meals and gifts.

Shaun, who less than twelve months ago was single and care-free (though he may not have thought so at the time), looks pretty dazed. To go from rented room with single unmade bed to head of house with five members? I think I might have experienced that same exquisite feeling once when I accidentally skied a black diamond slope. I thought it was the bunny hill. Shaun has had a shocking crash course in everything from auto insurance to body fluids. Yet he is tender and loving as a father and husband.

Manessah is very dear with the babies. I've seen her cradle one in her lap and sweetly sing, "Hush little baby don't say a word, mama's gonna buy you a mocking bird." I've also seen her throw a pacifier at her brother, bouncing it off his skull when asked to give it to him. I think she is torn between loving Elisha and Kaiden and devilishly making her parents pay for this terrible thing they've done to her. (I have assured her of our undying affection for her.)

The rest of us? We're okay. I'd love a vacation. But wouldn't we all? *✿*



Shaun multitasking



Manessah holding Eli

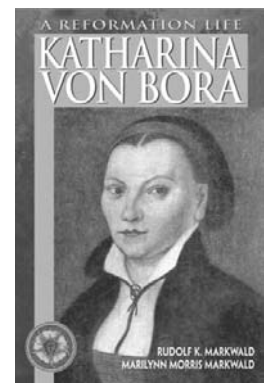
## Final Notes

### Pestilence, War and Fright

There are a lot of things in our lives these days to make us fear. With war looming, perhaps even upon us by the time this is mailed, thoughts of biological warfare, of terrorism. And not only war, but other lesser pestilences. I can see the pressure building to DO something about the mosquito borne West Nile virus. How bout let's spray the entire country with poison?

How afraid ought we to be? How far do we go to get away from what is wrong with life and the world? How much protection should we seek?

While reading *Katharina von Bora: A Reformation Life* by Rudolph & Marilyn Markwald, I was struck by Martin Luther's incredibly current position on the plague which raged through the sixteenth century. Remember that anyone who had the means split for the countryside as fast as their horses could gallop. This disease was so contagious and so deadly that most people put as much distance as possible between themselves and the sick even if it was their very own family. In "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague," Luther wrote:



*First, one has to submit quietly to God, trusting in His love and goodness. Then staying put and not fleeing from the plague or any disaster is to be praised because it is a sign of a strong faith. But a person needs more than a milchglauben [infantile faith] for that. It is required (1 Cor.12:12) that everyone take care of his body and not abuse it by being dummkeck [showing off one's courage]...If no one is available to take care of a sick neighbor, he should never be abandoned, and Matt. 25:4 ff. teaches that all Christians are linked together so we cannot desert anyone in need but are duty bound to help him or her in the same ways as we would want this person to help us in our exigencies.*

*We must say to the devil, "Get out of my way with your scaring! In defiance of you I will help my sick neighbor and know that it is pleasing to God and all His angels. Since Christ has shed His blood for me and died for me, how can I not, for His sake, place myself into this small danger of a powerless pestilence?" Say, "Satan, if you frighten me, Christ will give me courage; if you kill me, Christ will give me life; and if you have poison in your mouth, Christ has more than enough remedies to heal me." p. 166*

## Marriage

Martin Luther and his wife Katharina von Bora took some hateful criticism for their marriage. However, Luther was never shy about confrontation. He replied to one such letter from von der Hayden written in 1528 who contended that since Luther had been a monk and Katharina a nun they would both suffer the torments of hell if they did not return to their cloisters. Here is only a portion of what Luther said:

*How dare you preempt the power of a common judge and condemn publicly, and before all the world, a godly woman as though she were a perfidious, perjuring, gone astray whore. Where have you, impudent young brat, learned to defame the virtue of other people? But so you will keep from writing another libelous letter, I send you my gift, "Aesop's New Fable of the Lion and the Ass." (p. 79)*

Owlich. Part of the church's rich history. I love our heritage.

That's it from Toad Hall.

Warmly,

*Margie*  
Margie Haack



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 our children, a midwestern Gothic four-square looked amazingly like a mansion. Possibly even as great a house as Toad Hall.

*Notes from Toad Hall and Critique*, a newsletter written by my husband, Denis, are sent to those who regularly support Ransom Fellowship. All gifts to Ransom are tax-deductible.

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