



Notes from ToaD HaLL

Issue #2 - 2007
Summer

To Be Where You Are

Spring was cancer season for friends. (You might want to cancel friendship with us.) When Kosmo (Carol Kosmicke) began to experience little seizures and some numbness in her hand, they were barely detectable, but she's not a psychiatrist for nothing; she recognized the symptoms and had a neurology work-up on a Friday. By Monday the tests came back showing a brain

tumor. And just that quick, everything telescoped as we rushed to focus on her beautiful head of red hair, apprehensive about the enemy cradled within. Plans were dropped, friends and family gathered to cram in good times with food and "Settlers of Catan," because who knew what would happen next? During her surgery we hung around praying and waiting for the results. It was good news bad news. Although the tumor was a type of cancer, it was a relief to hear them say they think they "got it all" and she was going to be okay. That was a lavish blessing.

Another friend learned, he has prostate cancer and now waits for tests and decisions wondering what course of treatment to take. His doctor discovered it by chance (though we don't really believe in "chance"). That's blessing.

Then there's little Amelia - six months old. She stayed at our house with her mom and dad for the L'Abri conference in February. Even then she was struggling with a cold that wouldn't go away. Some days later they learned she has an aggressive hard-to-treat form of leukemia. She's a tiny fighter and we pray that God and all his angels will assist her through chemo, lumbar punctures, and days without white cells to fight the smallest infec-

tion. And that he'll keep her parents sustained through blurry days of treatment and the hopes that her blood counts



Where's my Ben & Jerrys?

are the good ones.

Music can deeply bless in moments of speechless affliction. Katy Bowser sings, "I'd like to be where you are, I'd like to realign the stars..." [download the song at <http://www.myspace.com/katybowsermusic>] Katy's song is a declaration of love to someone, a guy, I assume, but it's fit for parents in love with a child, too. A parent might wish that just for a minute, for an hour, a day, one could forget this small person, this demanding offspring with the big voice and offensive smells that can kill an entire subdivision. But when faced with the unbearable possibility of losing that child, we take it all back. As the song declares: "Far from you is my least favorite place. When I said I needed space, I only meant a little; I like to be where you are." We declare it in the midst of uncertain

futures and sleepless nights of prayer: let me be the one; I'll take the hit in my body. I imagine Jen or Steve could sing this to Amelia. If only we could "realign the stars."

Crossing Death

Another friend courageously continues to live as normally as possible, blessing her family in the ordinary and the everyday while her blood cells gallop forward with an untreatable leukemia. She says: "I am not particularly anxious or sad. I have known since I was twelve that my days are limited and in God's hands. I have every confidence in God's wisdom and His choices for my future. I know that He will heal me if He thinks it best (medical wisdom aside), and He will take me home if He thinks it best."

Her courage is another sort of blessing; she's a model for us, because we all know in one way or another we eventually leave this life, and we wonder if we'll have the nerve to face departure when it's time. With cancer we sometimes know when will be the last time to take a shower by oneself, or drive the car, or celebrate Easter with the family. That could be a danged hopeless prospect without Christ. The powerful blessing he rests upon our bodies, upon our entire being, is that he got there before us and now he beckon us to follow when it's our

turn. We are destined for this: To follow Jesus through death to the beauty of resurrection.

It's like when my brother and I used to crawl through the culvert at the end of our driveway. I'd squat down and call him through, shouting down the echo-y tunnel, I made it, you can, too, you're almost



Tolkien's Nazgul

here, keep crawling, keep crawling; and when he emerged on the other side of the ditch, dirty and a little damp on the knees, we'd stand together among the waving cattails laughing like we'd thwarted the Nazgul.

SELSB

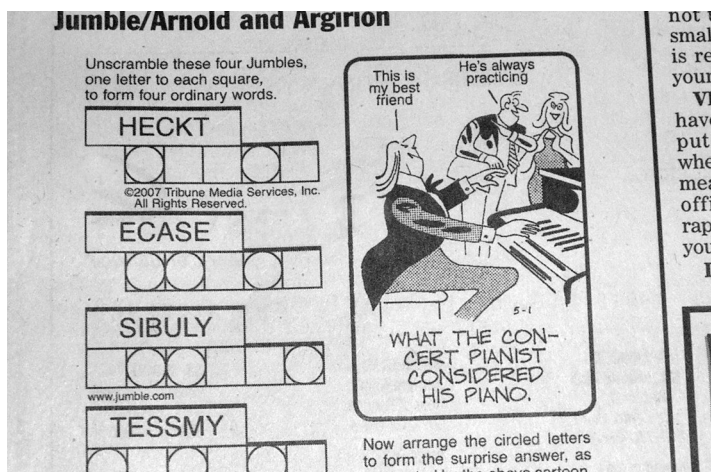
When I read the daily paper I generally pause on the games page where I check out sudoku and decide whether it's too easy, too hard, or just right - like Goldilocks passing through the Three Bears' cabin. Just right takes about ten minutes concentrated, twenty dis-

tracted if I'm watching Fox News - another questionable pastime. I glance at the word jumbles. If my brain doesn't decipher FECOEF* or IPHACTTE** in ten seconds or less it's probably not going to get it, ever. It's a visual talent and nothing to do with logic or intelligence which makes one more useless pastime although I like to think fast means smart. When I saw SELSB the other day, I was pleased when it popped. Then just as suddenly the meaning of the word struck. "To endow someone with a particular cherished thing or attribute." The word gave me a little thrill, like finding an arrowhead in the sand, or an unclaimed piece of chocolate torte on the counter. Could this be God talking to me? I like to be blessed. I like a

hand on my head with authority saying, "I bless you, extravagantly, lavishly."

*coffee

**pathetic.



You have ten seconds.

Blessing Lessons

I wish I could bless Sarah, a young mother who comments on the blog of another young mother. She's in a familiar place for moms in our culture. It's often isolated and lonely there. She's got good questions and a sense of humor. I want to tell her, my hand on her head, you'll be okay, God teaches us to breathe in places like this.

Sarah writes:

...i love my boy (only 10 months, and my ONLY ONE, mind you) and i am so thankful to be able, to be given the gift of being home with him...but oh how i would just like to sit down in the tiny corner of the guest room and work on the unfinished painting there, or start reupholstering the

chair or finish putting the paper leaves on the giant tree in my bedroom (that i quit working on exactly 10 months and 2 weeks ago)...i would just



Leafing Out, Slowly.

be happy to make dinner without a small whining crying baby scooting about clinging to my ankles trying to alternately eat dog food, find the only breakable dish in the one cabinet that is not kid-proofed, or lick the floor (that hasn't been mopped in months...). sigh. and this doesn't even touch on the 3 dozen movies unseen or the deeply disturbing doubts about the canon of Scripture or the inscrutable wisdom in God choosing to incarnate Himself -- or how could God take on human nature or die...i barely have time to pray each day let alone delve into these eating, can-

cerous questions...i have no idea how you keep your soulish parts breathing with five small children...And the funny, twisted thing is that i do

want more children. i've been praying for more and yet i feel all crumbly and un-moored with only one. and as i type this with one hand, my boy wiggles off my lap, tries typing too, eats a thing of chapstick, pulls on computer cords, and then beams up at me with this jolly life-giving grin before breaking out into screams

because i set him down three feet from me with a couple toys which he definitely has no use for. oh dear. life is ridiculous and unbearably beautiful in these tiny piercing cloying vignettes... (Used by permission.)

Inscrutably Yours,

Denis knows when I stop talking and become a bit snappish it's usually because I'm dealing with pain or fatigue. Not many are allowed to call me on self-pity, but Job is The Expert on Suffering, so he can say anything he wants. I read him from time to time. For most of the book his friends sit around

hounding him to death trying to pry out his secret sins. They're sure there's something to out because no one gets hammered this badly when you're a good guy. Every time I read the story, I feel sorry for him. After days of useless debate with them, God comes and gets him without ever telling him why all the excrement. Just get in the car; we're going for a drive. And God shows him creation, pointing out the way the stars are aligned, the way a lion hunts, the way a doe births a fawn. And Job bows, his hand on his mouth.

In our day we are still surprised by the universe. We get Science News, a weekly news-magazine, and it demonstrates over and over that no one has it all figured out, though scientists have fun trying, and a lot of grants get funded in the meantime. Why are honeybees disappearing? Why do those cute little Meerkat Supermoms practice infanticide? Why is Mars experiencing global warming? In what dimension do antineutrinos exist? I sure don't know, and neither do they.

Job understood God's point which was, you don't have a clue about me and all you have to do is look at the beauty and complexity of creation; my ways are inscrutable.

I don't have such good luck putting my hand on my mouth because I think I have some kind of right

to know why bad things happen. I need to be reminded again and again to be content with the mystery of what God chooses to reveal. As Tim Keller puts it: "Never, never, never think God is not at work because you can't see it. And never ever, ever, ever think you can figure out what God is doing." Okay.

The ending to Job's story is that he got back everything he lost and then some. This unveils another layer of trouble because I thought, just a tiny bit cynical, what a pretty ending to a hard-luck story. I'd like that. I'm not big on camels and donkeys, but I'd take a thousand acres in northern New Mexico, a flock of guinea fowl, and another ten children (if I didn't have to gestate them).

This is a fine ending for a fairy story, but real life often ends with too many blast cells, sudden impacts with windshields, or just a gradual shrinking of memory and bones.

Then it struck me: But, the end to Job's

story is the real ending and it has true meaning

for us. It is our ending, too. It is

the soaring affirmation that we are lavishly blessed both in this life and in the one to come where we'll see all Christ's enemies defeated, when the last blast cell is slapped to death, when the lost boys of Africa are found, and all governments audited for greed and injustice - then the wounds of the nations will be healed. Our secret hopes for the good and beautiful, hopes we dare not admit because we'd look like a fairy, will come true.

"How blessed is God!

Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love.

Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people-free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. (Eph. 1:3-10 The Message.)

Everything in heaven and earth. Well. Maybe I can wait for a place with sweet water, gardens, and family, enough for everyone.

"Never, never, never think God is not at work because you can't see it. And never ever, ever, ever think you can figure out what God is doing."

- Tim Keller



And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our

Ransom Notes

www.RansomFellowship.org

Watch for our new website to be launched later this summer. Matthew has already made some nice changes on the old site which have improved its look. The new one will be much easier to manage and have better features to help a visitor find what he's looking for. Denis and I both plan to do more regular writing specifically for the site.

Looking Back

When Denis was in Tucson (March) and Austin, TX (April) he met people - both Christian and non-Christian students, church leaders, professionals, many who were deeply interested in how as Christians we might meaningfully connect with the world around us. Of course, part of that discussion included looking at films - their stories and meaning. In Austin the lectures were held in a theater near campus where people were turned away because all the sessions were full. One student hesitantly brought several non-Christian friends and reported they came to each session and listened intently, surprised by what they heard.

We are honored to be part of a process that changes lives. Ransom helps by challenging people to think, by engaging in discussion, and offering insight, but we also know that lectures or a weekend conference can't replace the power of faithful friendship and

day after day sharing of ordinary life - that is where the gospel most often transforms and converts.

Coming Up

June 2, Leave Rochester.

June 4-6, Chattanooga, TN Visit family.

June 7-9, Nashville, TN, Art House. Denis & I will attend the first Board of Directors meeting for the Nashville Center for Faith & Culture.

June 11-14, Memphis, TN, General Assembly for the PCA. We will again host a booth for Ransom.

June 15-16, Travel back to MN stopping in St. Louis.

July 13-14, Norfolk, VA, Trinity PCA. This weekend conference was cancelled in March and rescheduled. Denis will be the speaker.

July 21-28, St. Louis, MO, Covenant Seminary. Denis will be taking a course on campus this week. I'm staying home to water the flowers.

The Nashville Center for Faith & Culture will be a L'Abri style residential study center planted by two young couples - graduates of Covenant Seminary. You can find more details by logging onto their website: www.NashvilleStudyCenter.org. Denis and I are pleased to be on their board. Pray especially for one of the couples right now - Steve & Jen Allen, it's their baby, Amelia who has leukemia. I mentioned her earlier in this issue.

Pray for us during the summer months, especially for Denis as he concentrates on writing and seminary courses, trying to get as much done as possible before the end of the year. Pray for me - that I'd recover quickly from sinus surgery (May). And breathe easier? What a deal!



F Family Notes

Mouse Tales

I found an odd little dot of dirt on my kitchen stove the other day. At first I thought: A piece of rosemary? Perhaps a grain of wild rice? I didn't want to believe a mouse had been there and left this defiant little deposit. I crossed my arms and quickly stepped back. How did it get up the smooth slippery sides of the range and onto the top?

I'm not very afraid of mice, nor am I ashamed to have them, it's just that, well, they're invasive and invisible, and until they

start leaving turds around you have no idea how many they are or how long they've been creeping up to the counter and licking your butter all night. That's why I have to kill them.

The following day I found a single deposit on the stairs. Again I stopped and looked around cautiously, like maybe I could hear them, or see them. I was on my way to the bedroom where I pulled the bed away from the wall to clean like I do once in a while to control the dust mites, another invisible population I don't like to think about. There, to my surprise, beneath our very bed were three more. I called Denis in

Yummy!

for a consultation. WHAT were they doing under our bed? The arrogance of it! They could start dropping off the ceiling onto my face while I'm sleeping. He didn't have answers.

We headed for Ace Hardware and picked up some sticky traps. I baited them with peanut butter and bits of oatmeal flakes. Two nights later both traps were tipped, dragged, and debris was scattered about like the scrabbling they'd done pulled dust balls from under the stove. Whatever, they escaped. After that, all we caught in the sticky traps was an enormous black fly and a centipede whose body was stuck with his legs detached in piles like he ran them off. Yuck.

We then tried these traps with a big V on them. (What does that stand for? Varmints? Victory?) They were pretty cool. With a squeeze, you could set the trap, bait it, and when you caught the mouse, you just released it with another squeeze. So I baited it with gourmet mouse food: Almond butter, feta cheese, and organic oatmeal, even I wanted to eat it. I set them out with a seductive call, come get your vitamins, you little creeps.

As you can see, it worked.

On Sunday one of the hymns was All Creatures of Our God and King/Lift up your voices now and sing/Alleluia, Alleluia. Between thinking about how we reluctantly exist with unsavory creatures and yet they fill some purpose God

has designed and the fact that Denis whispered to me how Rowan Atkinson playing Mr. Bean Goes To Church had forever ruined the hymn for him, concentration was a challenge. But I managed to squeak out some praise - thankfully God knows our frame, we are but dust. Another good reason to be a Christian.



I'm so SURE!



You should have gone to the country.



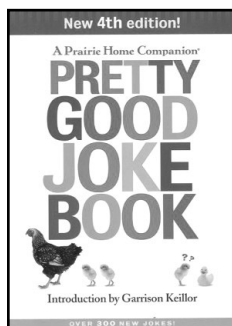
V is for "Very Good!"

Final Notes

If you aren't laughing enough around your house, do this: Get a copy of *A Prairie Home Companion Pretty Good Joke Book* and place it in the bathroom. It has made all the difference, shoot, I laughed my way through a UTI, and it's spiced up marital conversation, and we hear guests laughing in there, too.

Garrison Keillor writes in the introduction: "Your clothes may be disheveled and your life in chaos, you may be of the wrong religion and be hopeless when it comes to politics, you may walk around with the *New York Times* tucked under your arm, but if you can tell a joke, well, you'll be okay."

Here's a sampling:



There's a nudist colony for communists. Two old men are sitting on the front porch. One turns to the other and says, "I say, old boy, have you read Marx?" And the other says, "yes I believe it's these wicker chairs."

One for kids: What do you get when you pour boiling water down a rabbit hole? Hot cross bunnies.

For Lutherans and Swedes:

How do we know Adam was a Lutheran? Who else could stand beside a naked woman and be tempted by a piece of fruit?

Ole: Hello? Funeral home?

Funeral home: Yes?

Ole: My wife, Lena, died.

Funeral home: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. We'll send someone right away to pick up the body. Where do you live?

Ole: At the end of Eucalyptus Drive.

Funeral Home: Can you spell that for me?

Ole: (pause) How 'bout if I drag her over to Oak Street and you pick her up dere?

The final groaner:

Knock knock,

Who's there?

Eskimo Christians.

Eskimo Christians who?

Eskimo Christians and I'll tell you no lies.

Ha.

Warmly,

Marge

Margie Haack



Very Handy



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.

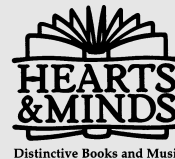
When we moved to Minnesota in 1981, our children had rarely seen such tall homes with their imposing three stories. They were used to one-story adobes which rambled along in the hot New Mexico sun. So, to our children, a midwestern Gothic four-square looked amazingly like a mansion. Possibly even as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

Managing Editor, Matthew Hundley

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