

Notes from TOaD HaLL

Issue #1 - 2008
Summer



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The Working Difference

Martha and Mary. Classic working women from the Bible. Single, too. For years whenever I've heard someone (mostly men, sorry) teach about them - Mary is such the darling. Martha is so-ooo flawed. WHO wouldn't know sitting at Jesus' feet is best, huh? Isn't it obvious Martha should've been sitting there listening, too, where we ALL should be?

No, it's not obvious. I like Martha. Mary annoys me. A lot of us need to be told it's okay to ditch our agendas and get out of the office, or the kitchen, or the whatever. But we should be told nicely and not like we're stupid for assuming *someone* needs to soak the barley and grate the cheese. Martha was stressed and her timing was was off. But think about it, if Jesus, the maker of heaven and earth, was telling her things don't need to be perfect or done right

now, then without a doubt, it's okay to abandon agenda in favor of sitting down and really being present with a person. When he made her do this, he put hospitality way away from anything that smacks of duty or show. But it's far more than this. Jesus releases her from the cultural definition of what made a woman successful and even desirable in her day. I hear that. It's still countercultural. (Luke 10:38 ff)

I read John 11 this morning. Mary was sitting down again - granted, they were in deep grief after the death of their brother, Lazarus; but this time it was Martha who went to Jesus when she heard he was coming. They had such an intimate conversation there on the path. I can't get over how tender Jesus was with women and how many first things he told them - things that not even the disciples or theologians knew about God. In this case, he told her the Seventh "I Am" of the Gospel of John. (You know how theologians love the numbers, and this being number Seven, the perfect number? So how perfect is that?) He told her: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies....Do you believe this?" And she answered, giving the first clear confession of Christ in the Apostle's book, saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

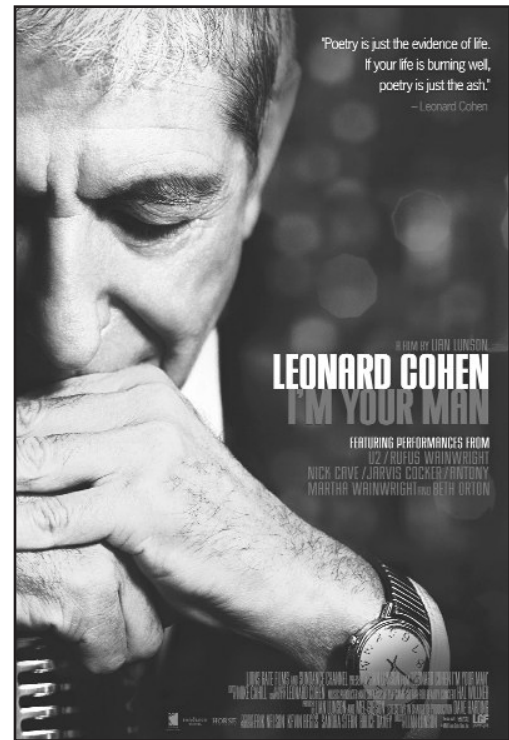
I love her. I plan to talk to her one day. I pray for wisdom to know when to prepare and work like she did and when to let it go so I can sit around like Mary when something more important arrives.



Dick Keyes, author and L'Abri worker, asks: "Which is more important? Washing dishes or praying? It can be a sign of sin to pray when it is your turn to wash the dishes."

"It is not only prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God glory if being in his grace you do it as your duty. To go to Communion worthily gives God great glory, but a man with a dung fork in his hand, a woman with a slop pail, give him glory too. He is so great that all things give him glory if you mean they should."

- *The Principle or Foundation*
by Gerard Manley Hopkins.



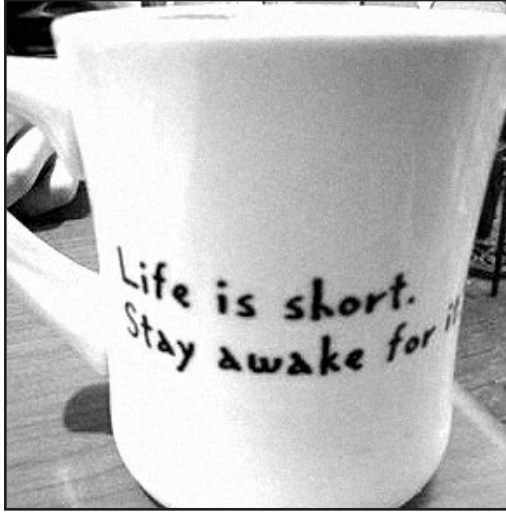
Leonard Cohen, now in his seventies, is renown for his poetry and music. Over the years many of his songs have been covered by such groups as U2 and Jeff Buckley. His task in the Buddhist monastery on Mt. Baldy in California was to care for the daily needs of his aging Zen master, dressing him, feeding him, walking him. His reflection on that work is interesting:

"For many years I was known as a monk. I shaved my head and wore robes and got up very early. I hated everyone, but acted generously and no one found me out. My reputation as a ladies' man was a joke, it caused me to laugh bitterly through the ten thousand nights I spent alone."

- From the film documentary:
I'm Your Man - Leonard Cohen.

"Life is Short. Stay Awake for it"

I'm sure Darcy, manager of our neighborhood Caribou Coffee, has had enough of her company's slogan. When we walked in she was slumped at a table pouring over shift schedules. Denis talked to her while I ordered from the twenty-two-year-old barista who leaned forward and whispered, "Darcy has worked for thirty-two days in a row, and today is her birthday. I've been teasing her she's a quarter of a century old."



Meanwhile Darcy was telling Denis she finally had to fire three problem-employees. One of them had already threatened her. It made her sick to her stomach to do it, and she was going to have to work more hours in the meantime. A good day for her right now is when she can get off for a few hours and go home to nap. Stress is waking her at night and she's decided to keep a pad of paper by the bed so when she thinks of something she can write it down and leave it alone until morning. I'm going to ask her what she thinks about her young employees' work ethic. Was there a common factor that caused them to fail?

gat no heat

from the blog *junkmailforblankets*:

My friend Rachel says that Abishag had the worst job in the Bible. I'm having a hard time disagreeing. Can you think of others?

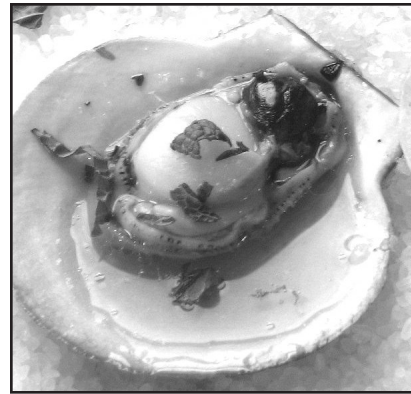
Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat.

So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And

the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not. (I Kings 1:1-4)

November 29, 2007

Yesterday, Bill, my husband's brother-in-law, fell in the icy water while scalloping in Nantucket Bay. He managed to stay free of the ropes and avoid his skiff as it ran in circles. He swam (in all his gear) to some near-by scallopers who saw his boat spinning, but didn't see him. They threw an anchor into his skiff to stop it and sank it. He was rescued by the coast guard. Seasoned, skilled, wise fisherman: I don't know how this happened or how he survived. Neither does his wife know. He's the last ocean-going fishing boat off Nantucket - he's endured years of hard labor, supplementing income by scalloping, bartering, and trading to keep on doing what he loves.



He generously sends us packages of scallops that would altogether cost hundreds at the market. I sauté them in sizzling butter with a little chopped garlic and fresh thyme, (not much) when they are barely done, I remove them to a warm plate and add white wine and cream to the pan juices, reduce it, pour it over the scallops. Serve it with linguini and warm French bread. I think of what they cost him. Each sweet little piece: dragged from the bottom of the ocean with a long rake; pulled up hand-over-hand into the skiff; picked over with fingers numb from the cold; each shell painstakingly pared open with a knife; and, the white muscle dropped into a bucket--the value of this catch is hard to imagine. I can barely eat this working man's harvest, but then I do.

"Lord, let me know clearly the work which You are calling me to do in life. And grant me every grace I need to answer Your call with courage and love and lasting dedication to Your will."

- "Vocation Prayer"

from *Saint Meinrad's Prayer Book*.

In the Precious Meantime

"'While-U-Wait,' the signs say. Just to sit under the bright light of the Jiffy Lube waiting room, sipping coffee from a plastic cup and leafing through a magazine while my car's fluids are being drained and exchanged, provides a rare sense of luxury. After all, I could be balancing my checkbook, grading my students' papers...Even in the space of 'While-U-Wait,' I feel I should be doing something else, something more.



"Yet some of my most pleasurable moments have come when I allowed myself to sink into the feeling that something was taking place without - or in the aftermath of - my conscious intervention: to sit in the sun, reading a book, while under a damp towel and the shade of my chair a ball of dough rose in a bowl or six glass jars of hot milk thickened into yogurt, to lie on my back in the grass watching the clouds, my wet mop beside me, while inside the house the water shapes dried on clean, lemony wood floors. The precious 'while' that follows when you have done your part, and surrendered the work of your hands to powers as great as sun, air, time."

- "Fall From Grace: How modern life has made waiting a desperate act,"
by Noelle Oxenhandler
The New Yorker, June 16, 1997.

"It is an error to think that those who flee worldly affairs and engage in contemplation are leading an angelic life....We know that men were created to busy themselves with labor and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when each one attends to his calling and endeavors well to live for the common good."

- Calvin's Commentary
on Matthew, Mark, Luke - Vol. 2

"I now suspect that if we work with machines the world will seem to us to be a machine, but if we work with living creatures the world will appear to us as a living creature. Be that as it may, mechanical farming certainly makes it easy to think mechanically about the land and its creatures. It makes it easy to think mechanically even about oneself, and the tirelessness of tractors brought a new depth of weariness into human experience, at a cost to health and family life that has not been fully accounted."

- *The Way of Ignorance*
by Wendell Berry.
2005, Shoemaker & Hoard.

Subject: Challenges

Tuesday, April 15.

Hannah!

Congratulations! That's exciting.

I think you are uniquely prepared for this.

May you deeply bless others and be blessed yourself. I'm certain you will face things that challenge all you are.

mlh

Tuesday April 29.

Dear Margie,

I believe you hit a certain nail on the head re: challenges. One guy I met in Sudan the first time told me that Juba, where I'll be living, is a "shithole." So it goes. I've found a certain comfort lately that even though I may not live in the South of France in this life (or maybe I will) there will be times to come. When I do a gut check of what I want to be doing, this is it. Thanks for your blessing.

Warmly,

Hannah Kirkbride

P.S. Does *Notes from Toad Hall* deliver to south Sudan?

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

- *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*
by Frederick Buechner.

Feed My Sheep

When you see that you're making other things feel good, it gives you a good feeling, too.

The feeling inside sort of just happens, and you can't say this did it or that did it. It's the many little things. It doesn't seem that taking sweat-soaked harnesses off tired, hot horses would be something that would make you notice. Opening a barn door for the sheep standing out in a cold rain, or throwing a few grains of corn to the chickens are small things, but these little things begin to add up in you, and you can begin to understand that you're important. You may not be real important like people who do great things that you read about in the newspaper, but you begin to feel that you're important to all the life around you.



Nobody else knows or cares too much about what you do, but if you get a good feeling inside about what you do, then it doesn't matter if nobody else knows. I do think about myself a lot when I'm alone way back on the place bringing in the cows or sitting on a mowing machine all day. But when I start thinking about how our animals and crops and fields and woods and gardens sort of all fit together, then I get that good feeling inside and don't worry much about what will happen to me.

- *Feed My Sheep* by Terry Cummings.

Ping

" 'Ping' - the immediate recognition of a truth suddenly grasped and aptly conveyed - is a quality writers work hard to achieve. Language carries both unconscious and conscious meaning. Writing can't ping until the two are integrated. When it finally 'pings,' we simply bow."

- *One Continuous Mistake*,
by Gail Sher. (p. 58-59)

My computer helps me with my writing work. It has enormous capabilities, but I often feel a weary guilt for not working the programs and knowing the software better. Most of its power lies untapped beneath the niggling little messages it sends about improperly unplugging devices, and should it close this or that window since it has detected a black snake in the closet dressed in my grandmother's clothes. I was complaining about this to Rachel Baldwin, who relieved me of some false responsibility with; are you a little crazy and would you rather be scraping hides and chewing sinew? Those weren't her exact words, but there was a note of authority in her voice when she said:

"NO one uses even CLOSE to all the things their computer can do. There is NO REASON to. We each need our computers to perform a certain number of functions well, and other than that, it doesn't really matter what they are capable of doing in the hands of a geek."

Ping

Fifty Years

Reading about the Jubilee in *The Good Works Reader* and thinking of the poor of this world and those who are poor and suffering in spirit. How we long for that year of liberation, which will take away everything that tears and breaks our lives, our earth! This is what an old Patristic named "Bede the Venerable" (672-735) had to say about the Jubilee:

"In the law, the fiftieth year was ordered to be called 'the year' of jubilee, that is, 'forgiving' or 'changed.' During it the people were to remain at rest from all work, the debts of all were to be canceled, slaves were to go free, and the year itself was to be more notable than other years because of its greater solemnities and divine praises. Therefore, by this number is rightly indicated that tranquility which provides the greatest peace. Then 'the dead will rise and we shall be changed' (I Cor. 15:52) into glory. Then, when the labors and hardships of this age come to an end, and our debts, that is all our faults, have been forgiven, the entire people of the elect will rejoice eternal in the sole contemplation of the divine vision, and that most longed-for command of our Lord and Savior will be fulfilled: 'Be still and see that I am God' (Ps. 46:10)."

- As quoted in
The Good Works Reader
by Thomas Oden. (p. 49)

Ransom Notes

Denis traveled a lot this past spring - teaching a class at Covenant Seminary, doing several weekend conferences. We've hosted friends and family and been hosted. Friends took care of Denis while he was in Arizona speaking and being sick at the same time. I've been to a writing conference at Calvin College where I was chocked-full of amazing writerly work. We're thankful for chances to give, but we also *receive* much love and care from so many. Would you continue to pray for us - for grace, patience, and wise words over the next months?

toadsdrinkcoffee.blogspot.com

We discussed blogging for a long time before I finally entered the sphere where so many meet for conversation. I think if we recognize its limits, it doesn't have to be shallow or completely self-absorbed. Or full of lunatic ravings (which, okay, I'm prone to). Blogs can have a voice that speaks grace into life. I feel challenged and inadequate for this, but what on earth doesn't extract a toll from us? So we'll see. Pray for the opportunities we have to connect with and to love the younger generation with the gospel.



Sanctuary Through All Seasons

We entered dry season a little early this year - often donations to Ransom's budget in December and January are generous enough to take us through the summer and fall dip. We watch Ransom's finances prayerfully, wondering if gas prices and mortgage rates will affect us. Trying to figure this out could make a person crazy. Thoughtful practice and wise decisions are always in season, but God is not bound by the financial expert's predictions or mine, either. Often he stretches our faith and trust, calling us just beyond safety - past the place where I'm comfortable swimming - out past the giant rollers. I don't like waiting to see how God will work out his ways, but when we make it over we are blessed to see it was always the right way to refuge.



Coming Up

June

Manessah, our granddaughter, visits for two weeks. (I'm oiling the craft machine.) We take a week's vacation with son, Jerem and family. Denis and I need to meet writing deadlines.

June 17-20

Denis is at the Evangelical Presbyterian Church's National Assembly in Baltimore where he and Steve Garber will address the gathering.

July

Some visitors coming to Toad Hall. Hoping for a generally quiet month to continue writing. Denis works on his master's degree - closer to being done. We'll try keeping life low key, but things creep up; where you had open days, even weeks: Suddenly! The calendar fills like a fungus unless you start swinging a hatchet.

August

The last half of the month we're swinging south through Missouri, Tennessee, and Birmingham, AL, for some speaking and other RF work. Don't know how this happened during the hottest time of year. Part of that time will be with five grandkids in Chattanooga. Yea!

Family Notes

Happy Mother's Day

FThis is my teenage mother at her high school graduation. She was still seventeen when I was born later that year, just a girl. She's now in her late seventies. I hope she doesn't mind my saying so. She was with us the last four days, and I tried to get her to watch *Juno*, the postmodern teen pregnancy movie, to see if she drank a lot of gator-aid and threw up in the flower pots, but she wasn't so interested.

I love when she comes. It gives her a change and I get to make sure she sleeps through the night without the adrenaline crush of going from dead sleep to heart-stopping hurry (she has to get up several times a night with Dad).

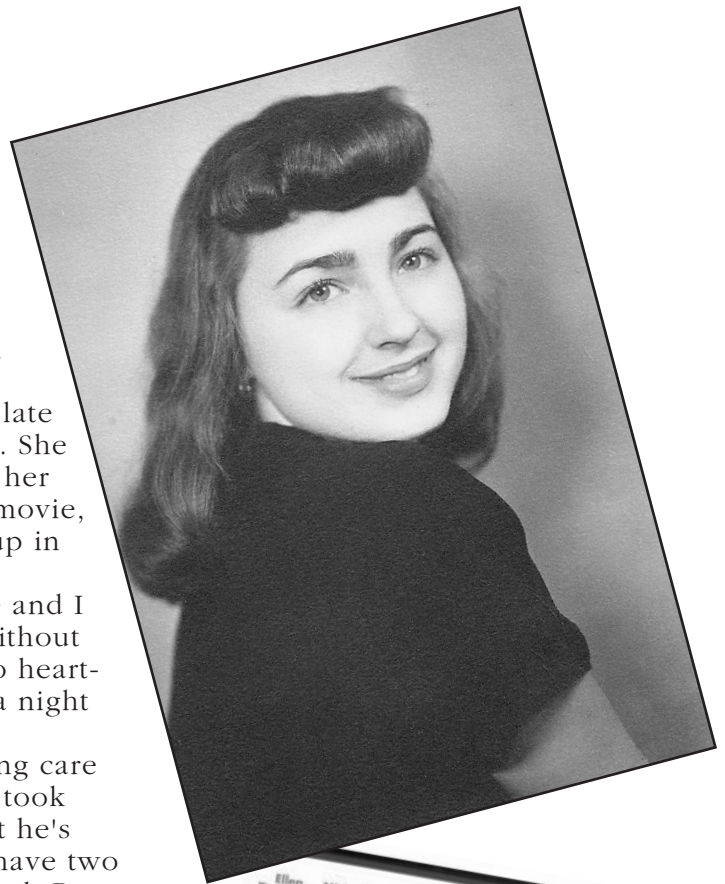
The past seven years her work has been taking care of him since a stroke paralyzed his left side and took away speech. He can feed himself and think, but he's mostly trapped inside himself. Mom has help, I have two brothers and a sister who live near. That's so good. But her margin is narrowing and the time between needing a break grows shorter.

When she got on the plane, heading home yesterday afternoon, she was planning to stop at the supermarket, drive the remaining thirty-six miles to her house, make supper, and about 8:30 when they're done working, two young women will show up for a weekly Bible study with her even though she lives seventeen miles from town. Afterwords, they eat a late supper together. They're both single, one divorced, the other engaged. I said, why don't you cancel this week? Give yourself a break, once. But she said no, the previous week she'd been sick and they really miss it. She also mentioned they usually stay until midnight or later. (If someone stays that late with me--I yawn repeatedly and start shutting out the lights.)

Although it's obvious I have some ways to go, she taught me the Bible, too. And how to make pie crust, and take chances. Neither of us like sticky, sweet, sentimental cards unless it's from someone under the age of ten or your own kid. So,

Happy Mother's Day, Mom.

I love you.



F

Final Notes

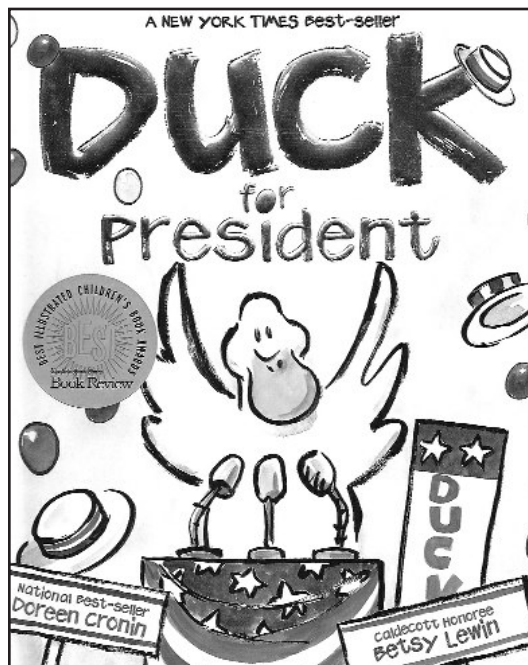
A Duck for a Change

We've been watching the primaries all year and thinking about our candidates, but in the end, I might vote for Duck. True, he doesn't have a pastor, and he hasn't heard the bullets whizzing past his head, but he knows what it's like to have no compensation for the work you do. It's a long story. It started down on Farmer Brown's farm where Duck was plain sick and tired of all the chores he had to do, and so were the rest of the animals.

It was always: "PIGS--Clean Under The Beds. COWS--Weed The Garden. SHEEP--Sweep The Barn. DUCK--Take Out The Trash - Mow The Lawn - Grind The Coffee Beans."

"At the end of each day the pigs are covered in lint bunnies. The cows are covered in weeds. The sheep are covered in dust. And Duck is covered in tiny bits of grass and espresso beans."

Promising the animals a "kinder gentler farm," Duck began his political career. He was so danged good at it, he decided to run for president. I won't give the final election results away; I'll let you get hold of this delightful children's book written by Doreen Cronin and illustrated by Betsy Lewin. It should sit on your coffee table for awhile, whoever you are.



Warmly,

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.

Managing Editor - Matthew Hundley

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