

Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 1 **Still Winter 2017**



The Power of Story in Three Linocuts

“Choose whatever you like!” We were sitting in the Bustard’s living room looking through a stack of original prints and the artist was making an offer we couldn’t refuse. Ned Bustard, editor, publisher of Square Halo Press in Lancaster, PA, is a printmaker creating art, not with paint and brush, but with cutting tools as he chisels lines on a blank piece of linoleum block where figures, words and designs come to life in black ink. Indeed?! I chose three that captured my imagination. Until recently I did not appreciate the skill and artistry of printmaking even though many great artists from Albrecht

Drurer to Rembrandt often used this method for works of art that endure until today. Making a print image is usually limited to black and white – there are no shades of gray as there would be when using a pencil alone. Without a range of values, the direction, distance and width of lines becomes critical. When the block is finished, ink is applied and paper rolled across and carefully peeled off. And there it is – the big reveal. A number of prints can then be made from a block and kept for years even after the artist dies, which is why we actually own a print from one of Rembrandt’s originals. What was suddenly clear is that when you look at the finished piece, you understand the artist had to conceive the whole thing in reverse because what we are looking at is the mirror image of the print block.

As Ned spread out his work it was difficult, but I finally chose three that have become even more meaningful as I continue to look at them framed and hung in our front hall.

The Three

Mary and Jesus’ Little Brother. A tender moment is captured as Jesus looks over Mary’s shoulder as she nurses his younger brother. The artist points to the halo over this young boy that has a cross in it. That is the clue that tells us this is not just any little boy; it is Jesus. Artists have



“Mary”

traditionally placed a cross in the halo so we recognize him as the son of God. There is another clue to their identity, the lilies appearing on Mary’s quiver are a traditional symbol associated with the Virgin. The reason I like this so well is not only the quiet softness of the pose, but the reminder that being a woman caught in an intimate moment is perfectly blessed by Jesus. We can be fully at ease in his presence with every feature of our bodies and in whatever natural role it fulfills while being human.

Lazarus

Jesus tells the story of a poor man named Lazarus. (Surely this name was intentionally

chosen because of its meaning – “God has helped.”) He is terminally ill with leprosy. He is homeless and hungry. All his hopes are centered on eating a little garbage from the rich man’s table – leftovers no one else would want. He lies on the ground outside a gated community – the home of a wealthy man who would be a billionaire in our time. But this man has no time for the disgusting, stinky affairs of down-and-outers. The only beings to show compassion to this man are the dogs who lick his sores. The poor man dies and is carried into heaven by angels. There is more to the story, but here in this image, Ned captures the first chapter of Jesus’ story and it is powerful. The rich man looks directly at



“Lazarus”

us with attitude. “Make Me,” he grunts, as he gnaws on a drumstick and crumbs gather round his plate. Beside him are a glass of water and a candle foreshadowing the unquenchable thirst and flames that are coming for him. Inexorably coming. Unable to sit or stand Lazarus lies alone, emaciated and dying. The dog stares into the distance as if he is witnessing something. Perhaps he sees, as animals sometimes do, that down the street angelic help is coming to bear Lazarus away.

All this is told in black ink on white paper. As it stares at me in our front hall – it is a reminder of the many good things about Christ our Lord; his tender love of the poor and the powerless, his rule against what is unjust. This is hope that despite the circumstances of our present world, of our current lives – for those who believe – ultimate help is on its way. Nothing will stop its eventual arrival. Amazing grace that extends to the world, to even me!

**Thanks. Merci. Gracias.
In Every language, God, I
Thank You.**

I love this piece that is simply titled, “The Leper.” This does not represent a parable or a story told by Jesus, it was a real event. Leprosy was the cancer of Jesus’ day. There was no cure. People knew it was contagious

so there were strict laws regarding your conduct if you were unfortunate enough to have this disease. You were not allowed to live with your family or your community. You could not marry. You could not work. You must be isolated, cut off from every public venue from market to synagogue. You were forced to beg hoping that somehow you could acquire the barest necessities for living your short life until death. In public you had to shout “Unclean, unclean” as a warning to anyone in your vicinity. It was in this context that ten lepers saw Jesus in the distance. They must have heard about his power to heal. They shouted *have pity on us*. He did and their bodies were made whole. As the Jewish law required they ran off to show the priest. One, only one, turned back to say thank you. Thank you, God. He was a Samaritan, the despised foreigner, the immigrant among the majority of the day.

This is the man Ned depicted with sadness in his eyes and lines of stress on his face hinting that until that moment, life had been without hope. With his fingers to his mouth, he cannot quite think of the right words, but behind his hand a timid smile is forming.



“Leper”

So, I ask, *how* does one say thank you for getting back everything that’s been lost? All you’ve ever hoped for? How *do* we express thanks for something we can’t repay? It would seem impossible. But not to *try* is bad for the soul because it does not acknowledge the giver. This incident tells us is that Jesus is perfectly aware of a person’s desire to be grateful, because he asks: “Where are all the others?” The words we say are not only for God, but for our own benefit. Maybe even more for our own hearts.

‘Thank you’ is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.

– Alice Walker

Ransom *Notes*

It's Like This.

They had last names like Swearengen, Fong, Wylie, Woodard, Garber and Oster. Donors. Contributors. Prayers. And sooo many others. Way back at the beginning of RF in 1983, we had a few faithful givers who followed us from being on staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship into the bigger world that included “grown-ups” not only students. Who knew?! What an amazing thing that after 44 years these people are STILL with us! How can we thank you before we all die off?!! And for all of you who joined us later and kept on helping Ransom Fellowship year after year? We are grateful and humbled that you would choose us out of all the many wonderful ministries out there. Thank you. Thank you.

When we began 44 years ago we were advised that what we wanted to do was not possible. There wasn't the need or support to make it work. That advice proved wrong even though there've been years when we teetered on the edge of shutting down. One of them was three years ago just as we were moving to Savage. We nervously went to the mailbox each day, praying thy will be done, but wondering is this the year Ransom folds or will we continue? Then came one especially large gift that provided enough surplus to shepherd us through thin times. This past year our coffers were remarkably low and that surplus saw us through. We begin 2017 not knowing how this year will turn out, but confident, knowing God will continue to direct us through the days of our lives even when the future may look uncertain.



Mailbox at House Between

The Writerly Life.

And so ... I've begun work on a sequel to *The Exact Place*, my memoir about growing up and coming to faith. In that first book, I left off at the time I went to college and now I'm plowing through another stage of life that runs from college to marriage to motherhood. And PLOW it is, as I dig up memories of a time in life when, really, we were wandering in the desert, trying to understand what it actually meant to remain Christian. Our family and life principles were forming during those years. The trick now is, as my mind grows old and inflexible, can it actually remember with accuracy what happened? Denis enters the fabric of my life and he requests that I please remember some of the good stories about him. (hmmm. We'll see. I think he just handed me a power card here.) In truth, one of my goals is to be careful not to embellish or rewrite history just to make a good story or a humorous point. A good memoirist should be able to either take what happened in real life and make it interesting or admit they are writing fiction.

Denis is working on two book manuscripts and hopes to have a literary agent working with them by the end of summer. One is a book on faithfulness in a pluralistic world and the other is a series of personal reflections, he says, on learning to hear from God, Scripture, art, music, poetry, people who disagree with me, the refugee, the immigrant. (and Margie?) He's been working on this for a long time, but I think he's finally got it wrangled into submission.

We ask for continuing forbearance and prayer. Writing is such a weird occupation. For weeks, even months it can look like nothing is happening. It requires saying no to good things that pop up in life and want your attention. It can mean sitting and looking like you're doing NOTHING. Wasting time, staring out the window. Reading a book that has nothing to do with the project or spiritual formation. Sometimes I'm compelled to paint a room a new color in order to calm down and get out of the world of my manuscript. (It could be cheaper to just go for a walk?)

The New Website!

Everyday someone around here, mainly Anita, works on getting this up and running. Arggh. SOOO not my cup of tea. And my poor blog! Haven't posted for ages and will need to rebuild readership from squat. Please stay with me! Malley Design did a great job rebuilding it, but we need to format and check out a ton of material that takes hours of work.

We think what we've produced over 30 plus years might still be helpful as people lead film discussions, ponder issues of living in a pluralistic society and seek to be faithful in their corner of life. We want it to be a place where people can be encouraged and stimulated to live out every calling in life. Both Denis and I plan to blog more regularly hoping for more conversations.



Ransom's Display at L'Abri Conference

Request!

Eventually Ransom will need to stop mailing *Critique* and *Letters From the House Between*. Before we turn out the lights altogether, for those who wish it, we would like to email the publications. This is NOT happening yet, but we are beginning to prepare for it down the road. So send us your email address and we PROMISE not to inundate or SELL your info – especially if you send it on a twenty dollar bill. Only kidding. Sorry.

Prayer.

Thanks for praying about our L'Abri conference workshops. They were well attended and as always it's a huge pleasure to see old friends, make new and have as many conversations as possible. (Thanks to all of you who came in and sat down to hear Denis on "Story in Film" and me interview the lovely Karen Choi, singer/songwriter.) The conference is a reminder of all you folks out there who are living out your callings in ordinary ways, often with difficult, sometimes tragic circumstances but also finding the joy of lifting a corner of darkness wherever you are. We bless you.

Nashville.

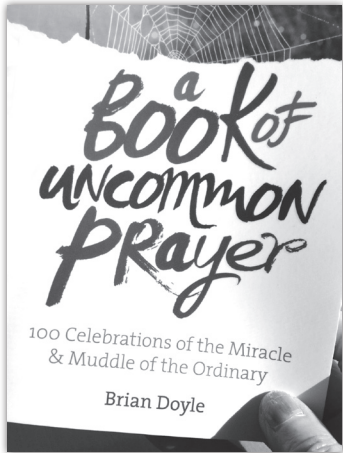
Pray for Denis' class on March 3rd and 4th when he will be teaching at Covenant Seminary's satellite campus. The weekend course will include his normal range of engaging the culture with the Gospel in winsome ways and the process of living intentionally and with discernment in a pluralistic society.

And Finally...

Lately I've had more cause for gratitude toward tech guys. Like the ones who built Ransom's new website at Malley Design and for Rick, the guy who comes to my desk and waves a healing wand over my computer. I say "Thank you" to them and dedicate the following prayer:

"Prayer of Gratitude and Awe for the Lanky Silent Genius Informational Technology Guy Who Just Fixed My Computer by Glaring at it & Waving His Hand"

And then nodded politely at me and vanished. You wouldn't believe how quick and efficient and deft and un-arrogant this kid was, and he looked to be about nine years old, although he had one of those awful chin-sprout goatees like strands of seaweed growing out of his face. He was on time, he asked me penetrating questions about the disaster and did not flinch when I used rude and vituperative language about the defiant machine, and then he sat down for forty seconds and instantly diagnosed and solved the problem. Nor did he then sneer at me for being a dolt, or crow over his triumph, or do a little victory dance while singing some horrifying modern music; he stood up, offered me my chair courteously, gave me his card with direct phone access in case of further questions, and slid away silently. We never say thanks enough for people who can do well the things that we cannot even imagine doing poorly; but this morning, for a moment you and me together, standing closely but not holding hands or any of that sort of thing, should do so. And so: amen.



From *A Book of Uncommon Prayer* by Brian Doyle

And so ... to you, too, may your technology work without flaw and at times may your life be device free,



Warmly,

Margie Haack

About Letters From the House Between

If you drive through western Kentucky where two great southern rivers – the Cumberland and the Tennessee – 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.

Letters from the House Between is not available by subscription. Rather, interested readers can request to be added to Ransom's mailing list, which is updated frequently. Donors to Ransom Fellowship, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-deductible ministry, are added automatically unless requesting otherwise. Everyone on Ransom's mailing list also receives Critique magazine. To receive them send your mailing address to:

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