

# Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 2 **Spring 2017**



## Dear Friends

Gradually the wall colors of House Between have been changing from real-estate beige (every room was such a yawner the problem *had* to eventually be addressed when I found the time and, hey, the money to do it) to much more vibrant and interesting hues. We moved in almost three years ago and currently the most recent victim of my obsession has been the living room. I happened to pick *Poised Taupe*, which is Sherwin Williams' color of the year, for the change. Honest. I wasn't trying to be trendy or hip, it just seemed to fit and blend especially well with the fireplace bricks and our art. And who names paint colors, anyway? I want that job.

The walls of the living room are mostly accessible to average home-owners who are fit and in the prime of life. There was just one troublesome spot that presented a tiny problem because it is practically in the stratosphere. Like maybe 25 feet into the stratosphere. Husband looked up at that spot on the wall and said *I want you to promise me you won't get the ladder and climb up there.* He doesn't like heights and besides his knees hurt pretty much all the time, so he couldn't do it, but he sure didn't want me to do it either. I solemnly replied, *I promise. I won't.*



*Sherwin Williams' color of the year.*

Bit by bit I worked on sections. Painting is so satisfying. There isn't a lot in life that not only has closure, but there in front of you, as you paint, you have evidence that what you are doing actually has the intended results. That alone might be beautiful enough to satisfy the soul and the eye. Writing is never like that. At least not for me. Writing, even a simple email, is revise, revise, revise. Social media's never ending chains of cute puppies and perfect babies and the universe of

edible deliciousness that everyone but me is making and eating can lead to such a state of despair I want to stab out my eyes and never write or post a single word again.

So, quietly, section by section, the living room has become *Poised Taupe*.

### **You are not a promise keeper**

When it came to the tiny problem, I honestly tried to think of various ways to solve it and not break my promise. We couldn't possibly HIRE someone to do that little area – that would be too inefficient. I didn't want to endanger friends either. The conclusion finally forced itself on me: I had to go back on my word. I would have to do it myself.

A Friend carried in our tall aluminum construction ladder and leaned it up against the wall. I didn't want Friend to risk climbing up herself since high-climbing for this otherwise perfect person, makes her a little dizzy, and she knew she couldn't stop me anyway, stubborn as I am.

Furtively, I crept to the top hoping Husband who was in the next room at his desk would be so immersed he wouldn't ever even know what I was up to, and I quickly cut in that peak area. Everything went perfectly well, until I reached the bottom, backed up off the last rung and

fell over half a gallon of paint. That's when Husband's face appeared over mine.

Now the good thing about Sherwin Williams is that their paint is about the consistency of vanilla pudding and it stayed on the paint cloth while Friend and I scooped most of it back into the can with only a bit of paint clinging to my black flats. (Who wears their good black flats to paint in, anyway? There's all kinds of wrong with me.) The next very bad thing was there was no way to deny what I had done. I couldn't even lie or act innocent about how that part of the wall got done, or who could have possibly done it.

Theologically there is a problem here, at least on my part. Lying, for starters? My pastor quibbles with me saying it wasn't lying, but breaking a promise which is different. Whatever. I like pleasing people too much and will often agree to something I really shouldn't because if pressed, I might (will?) break my promise just as I have here. So to call it sin is probably accurate. I was truly sorry for scaring Denis. Later he told me in accusatory tones, you have no idea how frightening that was. By the way, if you've never experienced this let me warn you, most guys who are frightened and alarmed get mad. So he was mad for awhile. Really mad.

I concede; the risks I'm tempted to take at my age are probably foolish and may end up harming





*How high is that?*

me. Apparently the height of the ceiling isn't the only place with a difficult reach for me, so are certain kinds of wisdom and I'm not there yet. Still, I have hope that some day I'll reach a better place than where I am now. (Though given my age, it better happen fast.) It was also wrong to break my word. I'm sorry for it. The best I can offer at the moment is that I better not make a promise unless I plan to keep it.

### **Sustaining the Marriage**

In Ann Patchett's book *The Story of a Happy Marriage*, she writes about what it takes to sustain a marriage. (The same can be said of friendships, I believe. So I'm not just talking about married folks.)

*There are always those perfect times with the people we love, those*

*moments of joy and equality that sustain us later on. I am living that time with my husband now. I try to study our happiness so that I will be able to remember it in the future, just in case something happens and we find ourselves in need. These moments are the foundation upon which we build the house that will shelter us into our final years, so that when love calls out, "How far would you go for me?" you can look it in the eye and say truthfully, "Farther than you would ever have thought was possible." (P 224)*

Her words reveal a wisdom that is very refreshing to hear, partly because they are said without the typical cynicism and self-indulgent concerns which often characterize the relationships of our age. But what about those other moments? What will sustain you or me through all those times when life is far from perfect, rife with disappointments and difficulties and, as in my case, the broken promises, that shape our history? Not only must I wrestle with my partner's flaws, but I must own up to my own. In looking at any part of myself, I am dismayed. My shortage of wisdom. My body. My hooded eyes and wrinkled cleavage.

My mind of forgetfulness – more and more often I need to retrace my steps to figure out where I was headed and what I planned to do once I got there. These are the trickier parts of life we must navigate in long term relationships.

What melts my heart is Patchett's reference to the shelter we need and hope to find during in our final years. It touches me because I want it so dearly. So as I study the times of happiness and difficulties Husband and I have had together, I am acutely aware of the need for extended grace and love on both our parts, the kind that goes beyond the physical and mental and into a much deeper realm. They are, indeed, gifts to the soul. This coupled with a whole lot of forgiveness will be the shelter we need to make it to the end.

All this aside, I must admit I do love "Poised Taupe." It looks great on our walls.



*"How far would you go for me?"*

# Ransom *Notes*

## A small update on the life of Ransom at *House Between*

Denis has some speaking lined up for the summer: among them he will be lecturing at L'Abri in Rochester on June 30, and preaching at our church on Sunday July 30. Lately, he's been scrambling to get out the next issue of *Critique* and to meet chapter deadlines for two collections of essays. More on them as they become available.

Our new website is up and running. It looks good and we've had encouraging feedback on the ease of navigating and updated look. Do check us out at [www.ransomfellowship.org](http://www.ransomfellowship.org). We appreciate any and all feedback.



*Calm. A place to write.*

I continue to plug away at essays and a memoir that mines the days and years we spent in the Southwest where first we lived in a commune and later as Denis joined the staff of a church. There are times when I despair ever finishing this manuscript. Some this bad attitude was partly brought on by a nasty virus that hung on for weeks while I coughed like a crazy woman and felt brain-dead for days.

To remedy this derailment – Denis suggested I get away to a friend's cabin where I might dig myself out of this hole and begin more regular writing routines. Anita has accompanied and is savoring a long-delayed project – sewing a summer clothing for herself. Sadly, Denis was left behind to mind Honeysuckle and my four little hens and *don't forget to water the garden, Denis.*

Many thanks to those of you who support and love us – whether by prayer or donations. Hearing from people is encouraging – we are blessed to not be alone in this work. As is typical at this time of year we head into the lean months of summer watching and praying for God's provision. He never tires of stretching his children's faith in ways appropriate to our lives.

Many of you are already experienced caring for elderly parents and know what it takes. Now that Denis' father has passed we enter a new stage with his mother where helping and caring for her adds to our schedule and responsibilities. Learning to roll with the unexpected is required and that is a challenge for we (Denis?) who love predictability. There is definite reward in giving and loving in this way, especially knowing that one day we, too, may need grace and sacrifice from someone near to us.

Our church has asked Denis to lead an arts team to oversee a new art gallery in our gathering space which will include featuring a local artist, hosting openings with interviews and discussions. This has meant collaborating with others and deepening friendships as we execute these ideas. It is exciting to encourage and support the gifts artists bring to human flourishing. We continue to enjoy and nurture other relationships in our area. It still delights us to have people in our home where we can give the gift of hospitality and a safe place for meaningful conversations.

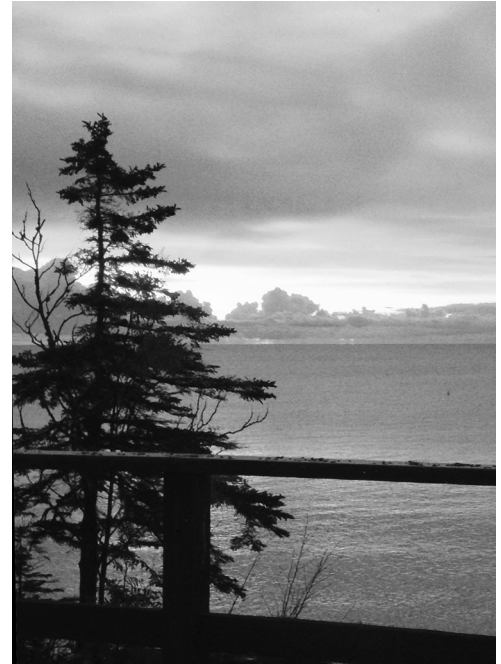
# Family Notes

## Thoughts on the death of my 93 year old father-in-law. *A great, unhappy dilemma.*

One of the last times Denis was with his father, a retired missionary and preacher, his father brought up how much he despised Barak Obama and the “fact” that he was a Muslim.

At a time like that, you have a choice. Let it go, or do you make an effort to correct a false notion? I can’t say for sure. But in this case, the outcome probably supports the wisdom of letting it go. There are times when trying is of no use and, if what you hope for is an improved relationship this won’t help. I can see understand how even a “kindly” delivered correction can make a person react defensively.

Tuning down the rhetoric, Denis quietly suggested we need to be careful of our sources and when Christians perpetrate false ideas it doesn’t help the world respect either Christians or the Gospel. His father’s response was shrewd and stinging and certainly served to shut Denis up. He scoffed, “You have never cared about the Gospel for *one* moment of your *entire* life.”



*Waiting for dawn.*

That actually sums up what this father thought of this son from the beginning. It also, in a way, reflects the story of his own life; anyone who didn’t share his opinion was an enemy that must be belittled and annihilated. Nothing Denis ever did drew a “well done” from his father. Not one thing. We aren’t sure why this was so. Even I was counted among Denis’ great faults as the woman who encouraged him to walk down the life-long path of a backslider. Who would have thought?

So, when his father died last month, it truly was a time of grief and mourning. The longing for what never existed – a kind and loving father – had left this life along with hopes of reconciliation. Healing must now be consigned to the next life. Denis also grieves for his mother who doesn’t know how to live without someone controlling every word and decision. On the blessing side, it’s now possible for us to care for her in a way couldn’t while his father was living.

For me, his death precipitated another round of repentance for the anger and hateful feelings that rush to my heart. Many times over the years I thought I had laid them to rest, forgiven both him and myself, received forgiveness from God and extended grace. But now they’re back again. If you think of us, pray:

**For Denis:** that he would not feel so depressed about his parents and now that he is able to help his mother that there could be some satisfaction and joy in caring for her.

**For me:** that I would not allow the anger I have felt on Denis’ behalf turn to bitterness and that I would truly rest in Christ’s power to forgive sin, not only my own, but those that have been committed against us.



# And Finally...

What in life sustains us for the long trip to the end of our days? Sometimes a stream of despair causes me to doubt I'll make it looking even slightly holy or reasonably sane. And if I can't be sane, could I, please God, still end up as a kind and thankful person?



*My mom next to me and my two sisters.*

There certain observations that cause me worry. One is that I'm at an age and stage of life where sometimes I'm just plain tired and wishing for more energy on tap. That makes coasting with a large supply of coffee and mystery novels for my undisciplined, wayward self much more appealing than doing anything constructive.

Another observation is that more than a few women I've known who reached a certain age display some alarming traits. Did they always have these tendencies or did age lower gates of caution and civility? They often express anger and hatred toward, well, toward other races, toward people who look different, toward some innocent person who checks in to see about the laundry. My mother, thank God, is not so. At 87 she is mild-mannered, uncomplaining and delightful. I hope I inherited her sweet genes.

Ann Lamott writes in her latest book *Hallelujah Anyway*, "Over and over, in spite of our awfulness and having squandered our funds, the ticket-taker at the venue waves us on through. Forgiven and included, when we experience this, that we are in this with one another, flailing and starting over in the awful beauty of being humans together, we are saved."

More than ever I need to be reminded that God didn't invest in me because I proved to be such a good little worker bee. No. I'm in because Jesus reached for me and that isn't going to change. "For this God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end." Psalm 48:14.



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.

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