

Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 2 **Winter** 2014



Dear friends,

Tonight the barred owls are calling. We hear them in the darkness beyond our deck. Some say they call, “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for youuuu?” We saw a long-legged coyote pass through the back yard, he paused for a moment to look in the patio door. Perhaps he saw Honeysuckle sitting in her pen, a nice little morsel nibbling apple branches. His mouth may have watered, but he trotted on. The evening crickets and peepers are silent now. It’s a sign of cold weather. The crickets die, I think, but the peepers and toads bury themselves and emerge next spring to sing again. We’ve been here five months.

For the first time in this place we have witnessed summer change to fall, and now fall turning to winter. In place of the lush canopy filled with a thousand shades of green outside

my window, the dark bones of the forest have emerged. Trunks rise from the bottom of the ravine far below, some straight and sturdy others twisted and tortured. The dreaded buckthorn hangs on, more apparent now that others have gone dormant. It remains green until the last moment, invading, relentlessly spreading its ugly empire. But here and there, what was hidden before, appears – high bush cranberries clustered



Honeysuckle

like jewels and scarlet crab apples – to be made into jelly. Soon we will celebrate our first Christmas at the House Between.

We are stilled by wonder, asking almost every day, who has allowed us to live here? It's not a gift we deserve. Most of us take such thoughts – about not deserving good things – straight back to Christ where we sit pretty speechless over what he has given. It seems ubiquitous to say

we don't deserve grace, and yet we say it, don't we? We flounder toward God wishing we could bring more than a jar of ruby-red jelly.

Our friend Ed Hague, who has been a member of Ransom's board of directors, has been living with advanced stage IV prostate cancer for two years now. It has taken its sweet time running its course up and down his spine, playing a scale of hope and dread. It has given him excruciating pain, infections, trial drugs and treatments with a window of reprieve now and then, and the story is still not over. However, the past two years have also given him a gift he could never have imagined.

For him, these days are all about love. The gift of love (as he puts it) "you frickin' don't deserve because you're such an ass." You can live all your life being anyone, just anyone with community all around you, and you can insulate yourself from love by the barriers you erect. One of them is thinking you must never accept anything you don't earn. It makes no sense, but I often act as if it's fine if I make soup for you when you are sick, but somehow, you shouldn't be making soup for me when I'm sick. It puts me in debt. Then one day we show up naked and flat broke without a thing in our account. It's an alarming place to be, but I believe it is God's desire, his plan, really, to lead us naked and flat



Potato Leek Soup

broke to Christ's love – to the cross. I want to know more of that love and yet even with historical knowledge of God's faithfulness that should put me beyond doubt, the cost of knowing is a little frightening.

Yesterday, Ed and I talked about God's generous unexpected gifts, ones we know we can certainly never pay back. It will encourage you to read his blog www.wedonotloseheart.com. where he has recorded some of the wisdom and humor scraped from this terrible wound. He writes:

Since my last post, I have been the recipient of comments that have melted my heart, nostalgic emails, cards, letters, and just plain, inexcusable love. ...individually, these things are precious to me; collectively, I am floating in the ocean of your fierce love. It is a lovely way to prepare to go home.

...This has certainly been my path in this world. Maybe it's all of our paths. We are all refugees, because

(Continued on page 8)

Ransom Notes

This fall as we wondered where time has gone since we moved, it was startling to recall that from June to mid-September, we had overnight visitors on ten different occasions. During this time of sorting ourselves out, we went to Menards almost every day! We continued publishing *Critique* and *Letters*. I prepared *God in the Sink* for publication. We met new people and began hosting local discussions. As we reviewed our work and calling, we asked does it reflect what God has called us to do now? A major part of that is writing, but no matter how perfect the environment it requires intentionality. Recently I launched “Margie Alone Time” from when I get up until around noon. This means: go to your office, turn off email, shut the door (to keep me in), and don’t ddddrink too much coffee.

Update!

Last month we received a donation with a comment: “I hope the IRS doesn’t get this!” It reminded me that in my last letter I asked for prayer regarding the IRS harassing us because of a mistake they made. Shortly after the last *Letters* went out we received notice from them that *finally!* (after three years) they dropped charges against Ransom, but there was no admission of wrong-doing or apologies for the stress and lost time their threats caused. So praise God for delivering us!

Regarding Finances

For some time now Ransom’s finances have been so low that Denis ... well, let me just say it’s been a day to day vigil of praying and trying to proceed wisely. Still, I’ve been hopeful. Yesterday, a pileated woodpecker came to the feeder and whacked chips off the wooden tray and I was joyful, even. Today, in my early morning prayers there is no feeling good. I spent time crying because I fear sinking. What does the future hold? What will we do? Life feels uncertain and dark.



*Pileated woodpecker
on the deck*

As we all *must*, because it’s the only place to go, I throw myself onto what I know of God. “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Mt. 6:8) His intentions remain the same regardless of whether yesterday I was ignorantly happy or today I feel the heavy weight of the unknown. Whatever his provision for today or tomorrow, we aren’t going to rot in some miserable hole without his love and care.

I’m only bold enough to ask you for prayer. Pray for God’s purposes to be worked out every day in our lives. Pray that we would be confident and content with the life he gives. Pray that what we do whether writing, speaking, or just living ordinary days, he would be pleased to use us to lift a small corner of darkness for some who cross our path. Thank you.

Coming up

November 10-17 Boca Raton, FL. Readings, Film discussions, lectures

Mid-November release of *God in the Sink*

Mid-December *Critique* Issue #6 mailed

January 15-17, Chicago. Ransom’s Board of Directors meeting

February 13-14, Rochester, MN, L’Abri conference. Both of us participate.

Christmas Gift List 2014

You may notice this year's gift list has fewer books. Not because I'm ashamed to mention that I've only read trashy crime novels all year, but because we MOVED. Reality meant time and energy given to other activities and by bedtime, my main reading time, I was too tired. This year I include more items that are interesting and gift-able, but not readable.



The Milk Carton Kids *CDs, Prologue, Retrospect, and The Ash and Clay*

Until we watched "Another Day, Another Time," I had not heard of The Milk Carton Kids, a young,

flat-picking, harmony duo, but they've been around since 2011. They were mesmerizing. NPR describes their music as "gorgeous contemporary folk" and "Gillian Welch & David Rawlings-meets-Simon & Garfunkel with a splash of The Everly Brothers." They call their music "Folk Metal." (But I think they jest.) They've put out three CDs and are on tour now. On stage they are present to the audience with a mischievous wit and a sense of humor. I don't think you can go wrong with any of their albums and if they are in your area, catch them now in a smaller venue because they are great, and soon they'll only be appearing in mega-concert halls.

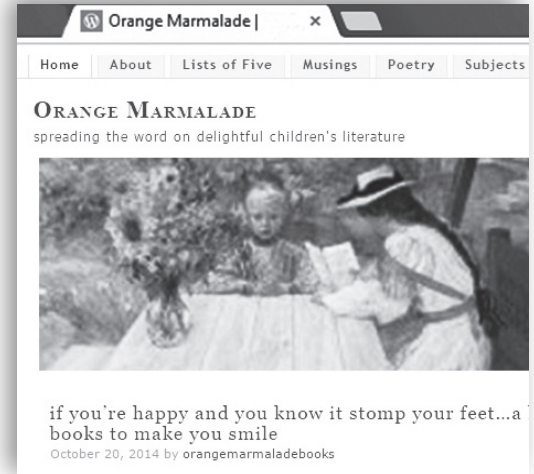


Ultra-light jacket

from Japan, Uniqlo www.uniqlo.com

When you have a friend who lived in Japan for a few years and has developed an eye for quality in all things Japanese from fashion to green tea, you should listen. So even though I am not into fashion fads, (you will see these jackets everywhere this year and they're all knock-offs) when he insisted these are the original and best ultra-light down jackets for men and women on the market, what could I do except check it out? At first I was sure I wouldn't be able to afford the cost, but the price,

the quality and the comfort of these jackets won me. My shoulders often ache and sometimes any amount of pressure or weight, like a heavy winter coat is uncomfortable, but this is, er, like having nothing on, as light as goose down, oh, wait, it is down. (NOT feathers.) My mom is getting one for Christmas.



Orange Marmalade

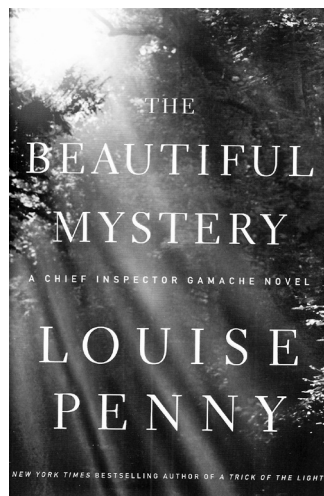
Children's Book Blog by Jill Swanson
<http://orangemarmaladebooks.com/>

This year rather than suggest a particular children's book, I am going to send you over to my friend Jill Swanson's blog, Orange Marmalade for some ideas. Her picks and reviews of children's books are always thoughtful and enticing. Her choices range widely and wildly. So whether you are interested in how big trucks rule construction or the world of wood fairies, she will lead you to treasure. She makes you want every book she highlights. We all, everyone of us knows, or should know that children NEED books, whether they are your own or a friend's or one you happen to love just because. I believe in buying children's books for myself *and* for children. We should all keep books that charm, delight, teach, reveal and even those that tell the truth about how real life can be as difficult as a Charles Dickens story. After you check out her book suggestions, head over to Hearts & Minds Books at www.heartsandmindsbooks.com where Byron & Beth Borger will quickly ship your choices out to you. And you will bless the publishing world by supporting an independent bookseller!



Whirly Pop
Wabash Valley Farms
www.whirlypopshop.com

Is there anyone who can watch a movie and not eat popcorn? I don't want to know you. Next to coffee and chocolate, popcorn is my most favorite food in the world. I can't live without it. Or rather, don't want to. The Whirly Pop enables this obsession better than I ever imagined. After years of suffering with Shaken Brain Syndrome from jiggling a pan on a burner, one day I said, What am I doing? For about \$30.00 West Bend has an electric popcorn maker that works just fine! And it did, until last winter when it finally refused to send the little stirrer thing around anymore and I decided I didn't like it that much after all, and went back to shaking a pan on the stove top. AND THEN, we moved. This new house has a glass-top range that I've already ruined a teeny bit by shaking a pan across the surface. THAT'S WHEN I was introduced and INduced to purchase the Whirly Pop online. My husband played a major part in this seduction. Where has Whirly Pop been all my life?! I love this gadget because it works so effortlessly and makes fabulous popcorn every time - IF you begin with a good corn product. It is simple but so well engineered I call it Art. And that's an additional reason to eat popcorn at every meal. What a great gift this would make for an even mildly addicted popcorn eater.

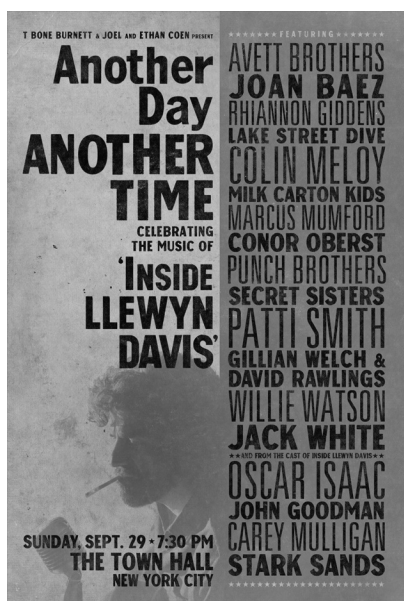


The Beautiful Mystery

by Louise Penny,
Minotaur Books, New York, 2012 (Fiction)

Penny is a Canadian author of a crime series featuring Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, a homicide investigator with the Surete du Quebec. Gamache reminds me a little of Father Tim from the Mitford series, but the stories are not openly

Christian and they tend to be a bit edgier. Gamache is a fairly complex character and the setting is Quebec so that keeps me interested. Some critics have called Penny Canada's best crime writer and although I don't think she writes great literature, I like the thread of grace and compassion that runs through her books. In this one, "The Beautiful Mystery" refers to the Divine that seems somehow present in the music of Gregorian chants. The murder of the choir director in a remote monastery where 24 monks live away from the world under a vow of silence brings Gamache into this unusual setting. The men have given themselves and their singing voices to the service of God, and their glorious music has become world-renowned. Gamache must uncover what discord has caused a killer to emerge from this seemingly peaceful community.



Another Day, Another Time: Celebrating the Music of "Inside Llewyn Davis" Music Documentary, CD

A favorite movie from the past year was the music documentary and concert *Another Day, Another Time* inspired by the Cohen brothers' movie, *Inside Llewyn Davis* about the life of a young singer drifting through the folk music scene of Greenwich Village during the 1960s. It was interesting, but it was the documentary and concert directed by T. Bone Burnett that gave the prime pleasure. With the many different musicians (think of the "O Brother Where Art Thou" music documentary) this evoked a sweet kind of magic. All around the stage, and the back studio as people conversed, jammed, practiced, you sensed their respect and love for one another under Burnett's careful direction. Tears came to Mumford's eyes as he sat to the side watching the Milk Carton Kids play and sing. I liked it not only because the music is very fine, but because watching creative energy come together when all the elements are dead right is something we wish to see in our own creative endeavors. It becomes a privilege just to watch and listen. Performers include the Avett Brothers, Joan Baez, Dave Rawlings Machine, Rhiannon Giddens, Lake Street Dive, Colin Meloy, The Milk Carton Kids, Marcus Mumford, Punch Brothers, Patti Smith, Willie Watson, Gillian Welch, and Jack White, as well as the star of the film, Oscar Isaac.

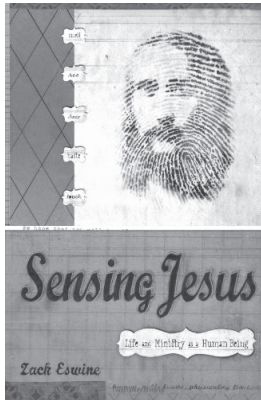


Nashville artist and poet drink to their book *Subjects with Objects*

Subjects with Objects

Paintings by Jonathan Richter & words by DKM, Rabbit Room Press, Nashville, 2014 (Art & Poetry)

I read some books as a form of discipline turning each page, trying to hear what the author is saying. However determined I am, some books are quickly laid aside because they can't hold me. Others draw me in from the first page and I can't put them down. *Subjects with Objects* is that kind of book. Each page is a portrait painted by artist Jonathan Richter that is so evocative we stare. Are they funny? Disturbing? Ugly? Poignant? We are uncertain. But as we look, we have a feeling these people are about to say something. We want to know *what* it could possibly be. Then, through the poet, DKM they speak. Below each painting is a simple line composed as a response to the image itself. It is most peculiar – as if the person has been captured at the conclusion of an interview and in that moment is answering the very question you wanted to ask – their histories, their excuses, their insights all exposed in a single line of poetry. The book is so cleverly evocative that surely you will want to enjoy the rich complexity of the universal, yes, universal truths that lurk in these works of art! At times I was smitten to see *myself* as I offered my own excuses for avoiding responsibility. This is one of the most creative book projects I've seen in a long time. Go to <http://www.subjectswithobjects.com/> to order the book and/or cards based on the characters.



Sensing Jesus: Life and Ministry as a Human Being

by Zack Eswine, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2013 (Non-fiction)

I wouldn't include a book that seems written to pastors or leaders in the church unless I was certain it had a wide application. Look at the table of contents and you note that, for example, he addresses the temptations we "sincere" Christians all face – that desire to do and be something great for God. We (I) need to often be reminded of limitations. Zack does this in such a kind and yet authoritative way that I can listen. When he says: "Christ says 'Follow me' and

I will teach you to do small things slowly over a long period of time for God," this clarifies and defies cultural norms that claim the opposite. He writes:

First, we can only be at one place at one time, which means that Jesus will teach most of us to live a local life....Second, we cannot do everything that needs to be done, which means that Jesus will teach us to live with the things that we can neither control or fix ... Third, we are unable to know everyone or everything, which means that Jesus will teach us to live with ignorance, our own and other's. In other words, we are not omniscient. (P. 55)

Sensing Jesus could make a great gift for your pastor. As Scotty Smith says, "where was this book when I was stuck in the unrelenting grind of performance-based pastoring; the spiritual schizophrenia of preaching the gospel of grace with a frozen heart..."

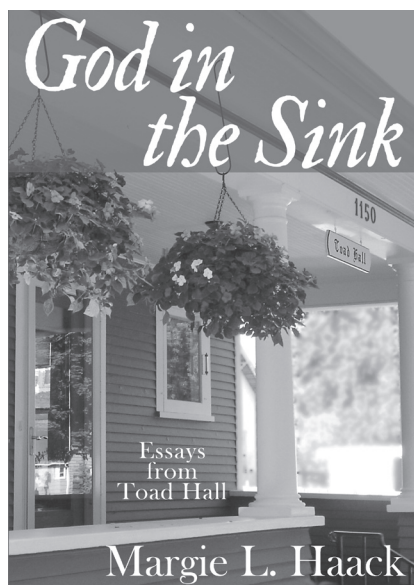


Longmire

Seasons 1-3, TV Series

Unlike other American crime series, *Longmire* is unusual in its unrushed dialogue and in giving time for a story to unfold; more like a BBC production. It is gorgeously filmed as the camera lingers on long views of landscape that lift us from crime scenes to remind us of the natural beauty that often ironically surrounds tragic events, and in contrast to the long shots we are given close-ups of faces allowing time to read thoughts and emotions. I love it for these artistic reasons alone. Set in Wyoming, Sheriff

Longmire solves crimes in Absaroka County as the backstory of grief surrounding his wife's death unfolds, appearing and disappearing like the the strata of rock in the mountains and canyons of Wyoming. Often Longmire makes hard choices between justice and mercy and sometimes practices both. His closest friend, Henry Standing Bear, is a Cheyenne who runs a saloon and always answers the phone with "It is a beautiful day here at the Red Pony and continual soiree." Cracks me up. Three seasons are available, however season four has been cancelled due to not being hip and sassy enough and for having an older audience, EVEN though after *Duck Dynasty*, it was their MOST popular program. (Well, slap me in the face, A&E, but you are also the idiots who cancelled Joss Whedon's *FireFly*. Oh. Wait. That was Fox.) Anyway, a set is available online or individual episodes can be rented from Amazon.



God in the Sink

by Margie Haack, Kalos Press
www.kalospress.org, 2014

One of the fascinating things about being with someone over the long haul – either in friendship or in marriage – is the chance to watch them discover gifts they didn't know they had. When I first knew Margie she didn't dream of having a writer's life – nor did she express any confidence that she was a gifted writer. It really was in *Notes from Toad Hall* that this became clear, and it was obvious to me before it was to her. She could take ordinary encounters and see past the surface to how they were signals, if you have eyes to see, of meaning and transcendence. Believing in both brokenness and grace, she could see how disappointments were hard, and yet also contained elements of humor that lightens our memory of them. I am pleased that some of her best essays from *Notes from Toad Hall*

are being published in *God in the Sink*. This collection is the sort of thing that's perfect for reading aloud on a winter's evening. You might find that bedtime is pushed back because what's been read prompts conversation, but there are worse reasons for losing a bit of sleep. And if you are unfortunate enough to live where there is no winter to speak of, just pretend and read aloud for family and friends anyway. *God in the Sink* is a grace for the stories it tells and the way it shows how to see the ordinary in light of the deeper reality that is our existence before the face of God. Your friends will see life clearer because you gave them a copy.

– Denis Haack, an impartial, objective, friendly critic.

Order now in time for Christmas!

\$11.95 (paperback)

- Go directly to the publisher: Kalos Press at www.kalospress.org and click on books
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Potato Leek Soup

6 medium potatoes
(Yukon Gold is the best texture)
½ cup butter
2 medium leeks
½ cup water
4 cups chicken broth
1 TBSP chicken bullion
2 cups milk and/or heavy cream

Peel and cut potatoes into bite sizes. Boil until tender but not falling apart (about 15 min). Drain.

In stockpot, sauté chopped leeks in butter until limp and translucent (about 10 min). Add water and bullion. Puree this mixture with a cup of the cooked potatoes and return to stockpot. Add broth and milk or cream and the rest of the potatoes. Add more bullion, water, milk, salt and pepper to taste. Heat on med-low for ½ hour and serve with crusty bread.

And Finally...

(Continued from page 2)

love seems so inaccessible and unattainable. Then, shockingly, God sends it thundering into our lives that it might have its way with our hearts. Yes, we the unloved become the beloved. Living loved in this world requires, though, that we hold both sorrow and hope together in tension. Embracing this tension is what helps us to live, and then die, well, I think.

As we talked, we agreed we still have a lot to learn about receiving the gifts given to us in this life. He said the day before he and Betsy had gone to the tire dealer to get new tires for her car. Ed took the service man aside, the man they've often done business with, and told him he



High bush cranberries

wanted him to promise something. "I want you to promise me you'll take care of my wife when I'm gone. That when she needs a replacement or a repair on the car, you won't take advantage of her, but you will treat her with honesty and integrity." The guy replied. "No. I won't. I won't just take care of her car repairs. I will take care of ANYthing she needs. Doesn't matter what it is. All she has to do is call me anytime of the day or night and I will help her." Ed said, he began bawling right there on the sales floor.

This kind of unexpected gift stuns me:

Friends like Ed. A tree with red berries. This home where we now live. The gift of being able to share a little peace and hospitality with others. I mean, we get to do this! A little convoluted, but a case of: it blesses *us* to be the giver.

I'm still trying to figure out how to say *anything* about, the biggest and best gift – God becoming man. It's been said in so many ways for millennia from brilliant to saccharine. Baby Jesus may have looked like a million others, but what unprecedented genius made him the Christ – "God with us," God for us? If I were him, it's not a plan I would have writ. Another reason to be...



Thankful in so many ways.
Noel, from the House Between,

Margie Haack

About Letters From the House Between

If you drive through western Kentucky where two great southern rivers – the Cumberland and the Ohio – 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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Savage, MN 55378

Or contact us

www.ransomfellowship.org

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toadsdrinkcoffee.blogspot.com

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All books mentioned in *Letters from the House Between* may be ordered directly from Hearts and Minds. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to Ransom Fellowship.

A message from the Ransom Fellowship Board of Directors

Thanksgiving 2014

Dear Supporters and Friends of Ransom Fellowship,

I am the guy that Margie writes about occasionally whose greatest claim to fame is that I'm not dead yet. I guess I'm like a car wreck: it's just hard not to slow down and take a look when you drive by me. I have Stage IV prostate cancer with several doctors having pronounced last rites over me, saying I was a goner. Yet I live on to the glory of God and to accomplish His will for me on this earth.

Here's why this matters: when I die I'm going to do the "in lieu of flowers" thing with hopes of showering Ransom Fellowship with generous gifts from all my friends and loved ones. I dream of Denis and Margie shoveling (tax deductible) money like they now shovel snow. I so want these dear kingdom-minded people to be provided for so that their ministry can continue to spread grace and truth in this world.

Now for the awkward part: I'm not dead yet. Plus, Margie just keeps looking at me and then at her watch – over and over again. Would you help me out? Ransom is in a very tight place financially this year. Budgets have been adhered to, but giving has been low. A generous gift from you would make me cry.

If I had the money, I'd cover the \$35,000 shortfall myself. But maybe if enough of us chip in and give generously we could take care of this. Wouldn't that be amazing? Ransom, and their kingdom work, would be provided for - and I could continue to live for a while longer!

Joking aside, I love these people and what they do for the kingdom of Christ. They embody our Lord when He prayed, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The Haacks, through Ransom Fellowship, are nothing less than a significant answer to that prayer. Would you join me in helping them to continue to be, for many years to come?

I am so passionate about this – and Ransom Fellowship!



Ed Hague

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Ed Hague".

Tallahassee, Florida

P.S [from Margie] Not true. I don't look at my watch. I didn't ask Ed to write this. I didn't even know about it until the last moment before press. He has threatened me. So here it is. Thankful for his care and yours, too.