

Notes from TOAD HALL

Issue #1 ~ 2013
Still Winter



Random Notes

Nightmares in Daniel

I've been reading the second half of the book of Daniel, and noticed that after the terrifying nightmare-visions that God gave him, an angel came to Daniel, further terrifying him. The angel gave him a sort-of explanation for the visions—which I sure don't understand. Daniel says that as a result of all this he lay sick for days. Then he got up, he says, and went about the king's business, but he was exhausted and "appalled by the vision... It was beyond understanding" (Daniel 8:27). The next chapter finds Daniel praying—confessing as his own sin the sins of his people. Gabriel the angel comes to him—another terrifying experience—and Gabriel assures him, Daniel, you are "highly esteemed" (Daniel 9:23). The English Standard Version translates it, "you are greatly loved."

The explanations, or interpretations, of the visions continue to come to Daniel. And still, this “understanding” does not give him peace. He mourns for three weeks, he says, in deep depression. None of this—receiving visions from God, receiving explanations from angels—was fun or easy. So many Christians have been gleefully intrigued and enthused by these visions, confidently expounding and expanding on what all this material in the book of Daniel means. But even in the end, after all the explanations provided by angels, Daniel didn’t understand. He only understood enough to be afraid, to be filled with a dread and depression that made him physically sick.

He was told a total of three times: you are greatly loved. Did this assurance get him through the experience? Was it the weight of the knowledge of the history of the world that laid Daniel so low?

He certainly had seen first hand some of the terrible and tragic suffering of the world—and then to realize that the kingdom of the Medes and Persians was not the end. So for ages and ages it would continue, centuries and centuries were to come and go with untold suffering: hooks in the nose, scalping, castration, slaughter, forced migrations of desperate people, idols erected and torn down.

Daniel says, in what must be the most anguished, poignant response for this wise and faithful man, “I heard, but I did not understand” (Daniel 12:8).

Can modern day pundits and preachers be confident they can beat out Daniel’s learning, wisdom and

insight? I don’t think so.

So the angel says to him, “Go your way, Daniel. . . Many will be purified, made spotless, refined, the wicked will continue to be wicked. . . Blessed is the one who waits. . . go your way ‘til the end. You will rest—then at the end of day you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance” (Daniel 12:8-13).

So. We live in an age where we can look back on a part of the story that Daniel couldn’t see: The coming of Christ—his life, death and resurrection—that piece of history and action that was needed to secure our inheritance.

We still don’t know when the end will be. Looking at all the suffering and injustice—even our own nation’s betrayal of peoples motivated by greed and ambition. We see tribes, clans, and peoples killing

and hating, and no end in sight—for us—but there is an end. There will be. I know.

And meanwhile there will be those who are purified and refined. I pray for them.

And I pray for myself, for us, that we can receive assurance of being greatly loved, blessed as we wait, assured of rest.

When Jesus was here he told us, “. . .surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Reviewing this from time to time reminds me of two things. First, that far greater minds than mine have had trouble comprehending the plan of God as he orders all things to consummate history. And second, that we are

encouraged by Jesus himself—who knew we’d need to hear him reassure us—“I am with you always.”

I do love this.

The solace of asparagus

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The first meal I prepared for the man I’d eventually marry and spend my life with, until one of us dies or Christ returns, wasn’t worthy of today’s bare-footed, deeply cleft Food Channel celebrities, or even the humble Mennonite *More-with-Less Cookbook*. I was poetically naïve, unaware of the sensuous nature of food and unfamiliar with Solomon’s sweet, sexually allusive “refresh me with apples.” Or was I? Perhaps some part of me knew that nourishing the body with a Sunday dinner might potentially feed a part of our life together. I surely didn’t know then that the skills I developed as a cook wouldn’t be limited to a private show, but would sprout and mature to serve many friends, travelers and guests over the years.

My peasant background lingers, my palate having been nurtured by my mother, who fed a large, hungry family in northern Minnesota. On Sundays, after a lengthy church service of weighty prayers and sonorous preaching, we arrived home crabby and famished. But when we stepped through the kitchen door into air so promising, so heavy with toasty brown aroma, we convulsed with anticipation. Often we had savory, slow-roasted beef, baked potatoes, gravy, crusty rolls, creamed corn, cabbage slaw, pickles, and blueberry pie with heavy cream.

Before church on that particular Sunday I planned to create a similar convulsion for Denis. I prepared slivers of garlic and inserted them in a small chunk of beef. Confidently, I slathered the beef with thinly sliced onion, salt,



Denis reads and rests.

pepper, and placed it in the oven to roast. I peeled four potatoes and set them aside in cold water ready to boil and mash the instant we returned. I opened a can of green beans and made a small lettuce and tomato salad with bottled French dressing. A pan of homemade brownies waited on the counter. This was the far border of my culinary imagination and I hoped he would be impressed.

Four hours later when we returned to my small kitchen, I hurried to the oven and pulled out the roast. It had

shriveled to the size and shape of a black walnut. Bits of burned onion and cemented meat stuck to the pan. I'd forgotten that Mom's roasts were 5-6 pounds each, and hadn't thought carefully about what a pitiful pound of protein would do all morning in the oven while I sat in church. Undaunted, I determined to make gravy from the residue stuck to the bottom. Scraping it up, adding water and flour, I was satisfied when it thickened to a gray paste. I poured it into a plastic serving bowl and distractedly set it aside on an electric burner I'd accidentally left on medium high while I whittled away at the meat. At last, everything was ready. As I lifted the gravy bowl I noticed an unpleasant toxic odor and was horrified when the bottom remained on the burner and the sides grew in long, rubbery strands until they separated, and the contents streamed down to happily bubble on the rings of the burner. I think I screamed.

We spent the afternoon scraping

melted plastic from the burner and cleaning the inside of the stove, our heads touching as we laughed and bent over the work. Denis gave me plenty of space to rebuild my reputation even though any time I'm in the kitchen I'm still only seconds away from disaster—as I can prove with many stories.



Margie rebuilds her reputation.

Despite the rough-draft quality of this meal a message was communicated through the language of food; simply, "I care about you." Amy Sedaris, in her funny, unsanitized book, *I Like You: Hospitality Under*

the Influence, writes that when we invite someone into our home for a meal we shouldn't be aiming to impress, but rather saying, "Hello, I like you." Nearly everyone we encounter suffers from some degree of heartache, loneliness or stress, but where the needs of body and spirit coalesce it can be our privilege to offer comfort, nourishment and occasionally joy within the ordinariness of a passing day.

As I write this, where I live, it is late spring. The rains and chill are depressing. The man I married isn't feeling well either. But I know something that will cheer him: cream of asparagus soup.

Now then. Despite the weather, some grower near here has harvested this vegetable. It has pushed its odd spear-like heads through the cold earth and I have a fistful waiting on the counter. I remember the first time I made fresh asparagus for Denis. He was extremely skeptical, having only known canned asparagus from his childhood—and canning is a

Cream of Asparagus Soup

2 cups chicken broth
 1½ cup chopped onion
 6 T. butter
 6 T. flour
 ½ t. dill weed
 1½ lb. fresh asparagus
 4 cups scalded milk (microwave it for 3-4 minutes)
 1 t. salt
 pepper

Snap off tough bottom of spears. Throw away. Cut off the tips and save aside. Chop the stalks and sauté with onions and butter in a 2-quart pot. After 8 minutes, sprinkle with flour and continue cooking another 5 minutes. Add broth, stir until thickened. Purée the sauce bit by bit in a blender or use a hand-held blender. Return to pot, add milk, dill, salt, pepper, and heat very gently. As it heats quickly stir-fry the tips in a small fry pan until barely tender and still green. Add these whole to the soup. Serve immediately with croutons. (Try making homemade croutons. Amazing, far superior to any store-bought.)

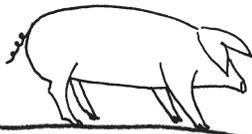
swearing, cursing, stupid thing to do to asparagus. I offered him a plate of steamed, bright-green spears with a pat of butter, and a squeeze of lemon—all you really need to

enjoy asparagus. His skepticism vanished. But even as a soup, asparagus reminds me that when God made the earth he included a ray of his glory for our nourishment and pleasure in this strange and lowly vegetable.



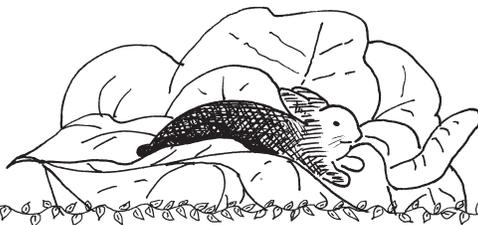
Hospitality

For our board meeting, Ransom Assisant, Anita Gorder made
Here is that original menu with hand
More recipes to come in



Pork Marinade (Great for Stir Fry!)

- 1/4 c. soy sauce
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 3 TBSP brown sugar or honey
- 3 garlic cloves, sliced
- 1-2 TBSP fresh ginger, grated
- 2 chopped green onions (optional)



Chicken Tortilla Soup

- 10 c. chicken broth
- 1 c. rice
- 3/4 lb. chicken, chopped or shredded
- 2 small cans of mild, diced green chili
- 2 tsp. lemon juice, 1/2 a little bit of grated rind
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. cilantro
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. gr. cumin
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/3 c. minced onion

Simmer all ingredients for about 30 min.
Serve into bowls, top with grated cheddar,
sour cream, avacado, & salty tortilla chips.



Wednesday

- **Lunch**- House made sandwiches, carrots, fruit
- **Dinner**- Vegetable stir fry with marinated pork and b
- **Dessert**- Vanilla ice cream drizzled with olive oil and

"If you're afraid of butter, use cream."

— Julia Child

Thursday

- **Breakfast (Self-serve)**- Granola, fruit, yogurt, bage
- **Lunch**- Chicken tortilla soup with Margie's homemad
- **Dinner**- Honey glazed chicken thighs, coffee glazed c
w/ yogurt and pecans, pickles
- **Dessert**- Grandma Frolander's Lemon Angel Pie

"He showed the words "chocolate cake" to a group of A
"Guilt" was the top response. If that strikes you as un
the same prompt: "celebration."

— Michael Pollan

Friday

- **Breakfast (Self-serve)**- Granola, fruit, yogurt, bage
- **Lunch (Chris Harper joins us)**- Potato Leek soup
- **Dinner**- Polenta, Pepper and Sausage Pie and coleslav
- **Dessert**- Margie's Café Flan

"If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's h
food give you their heart."

--- Cesar Chavez

Saturday

- **Breakfast** - Granola, fruit, yogurt, bagels w/ cream c

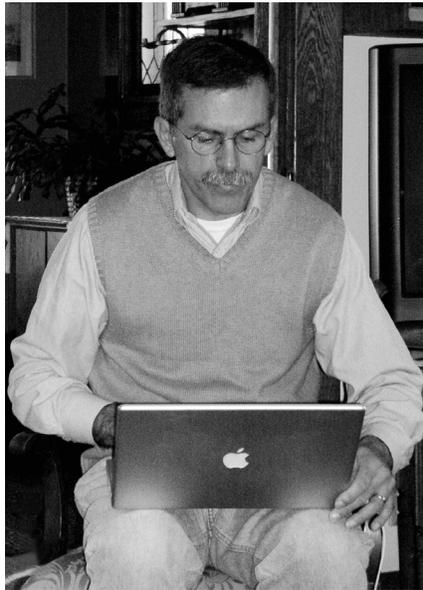
Ransom Notes

A Rueful Resignation

Last July one of Ransom's Board members was in a car accident that left him suffering from overwhelming back pain. On January 1 we accepted Ed Hague's resignation. He has stage IV bone cancer and doesn't expect to live much longer. It was the car accident that tipped off his doctors.

I've been angry at him and at God. Perhaps one gets more practiced at losing loved ones the older one gets? But I've little experience. In his typical way, Ed is helping us face this grief. It is a grief lined with quirky humor and honesty. Facing death has emboldened him as he tells us; "I'm now able to say difficult things to people and not care what they think because I'm dying. There is freedom in this."

"But let's not be insufferable about this!" I reply.



Since Ed came on the Board, he has led us safely past many shoals of the heart. With the skill of a surgeon, he has pastored us through computer disasters and tweaked all their techy companions. I can't count the number of times he patiently took control of my screen and cleaned up my mess.

As he faces death, he wants us to remember that God has promised to be with us to the end of the age. Even if "the age" ends in 2013 in a body riddled with illness. We want to thank him for preparing, as best he could, his family, friends and business for his departure. We want to bless him on his way although we will miss him dearly. He talks frequently about heaven and the wonder of being with Christ, and we know he goes there soon. Still, we groan waiting for our redemption.

In so much of life, the ripple-effects of God's work are too numerous and complex to understand. Throughout life, I have witnessed this in ways I never imagined possible. So, here, in one more thing I don't understand or want, I turn to God in hope to pray as Paul did: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be the glory forever and ever" (Ephesians 3:20).

What is happening with Notes?

This year you may notice some small changes in Notes. I will be doing more traveling and offering my book as a part of my life and work. Help with Notes will help me take on the extra load of travel, speaking and beginning a new project. Anita, who has been with us now for four years, knows me inside and out and has been in on all sorts of Toad Hall activity is bravely plunging into the Hospitality page to share some of our goings-on. There may be other changes ahead. I'll let you know.

Looking Ahead:

February 8 Rochester L'Abri Conference, Workshop: "Being Reconciled to our Childhood."

March 7 Lincoln, NE. Margie speaks to PCA Women's group - reading and book-signing.

June 27-30 Leakey, Texas, Laity Lodge, Women's Retreat. Margie with Andi Ashworth & Kate Harris.

Prayer Bullet Point List:

- Margie has numerous readings of *The Exact Place* scheduled over the next few months. Please pray that these times would help connect people to the reality of God's existence and grace.
- Denis is working on two books that need to be finished, and to a publisher this year.
- Please pray that God would continue to provide through the generosity of his people for our work's financial needs in this 30th year anniversary of Ransom (1983-2013).

Family Notes

A few shots and thoughts about family. We had a couple promotions, some small prizes, and memorable moments but mostly we slog through ordinary life with only occasional stab-me-awake for joy or kill-me-til-it's-over happenings.

Jerem (son) shot a skunk in his garage. It was a complicated blunder. I'm very fond of him and kinda proud of this.

When Isobel 6, (LaRose) started first grade, all her classmates knew how to read. She didn't. It worried her mom. A few weeks ago her brain had a spasm and suddenly, she was reading everything. Found their children's Bible, read it cover to cover in a day. Sember asked what she thought of it. Her review: "Let me TELL you about the Bible! Suffering, suffering, suffering! Those people SUFFERED. And the Is-ray-all-lights? Complain, complain, complain. God even gave them food from the sky and they STILL complained!"



Isobel reads



Anita & Marsena



Kaiden LaRose

Kaiden 9, (LaRose) suffers from an inflamed esophagus. Testing hasn't revealed why. He's on pretty stiff drugs to control pain and related symptoms. Misses a lot of school but still gets it done. He learned to crochet and made me a scarf! Lately Sember has the family on a restricted diet and he is so improved he turns down cupcakes without turning an eyelash.

The house the LaRoses rent has gone into foreclosure. They have looked for another place for months. Nothing so far. They hope and pray to find another before the bank repossesses and kicks them out. Sember is working part-time, selling plasma and scraping up money to take courses offered by the Allander Center. She has a passion for "Wounded Hearts."

Marsena (daughter) has moved into a third floor walk-up in a classic old apartment building close to the heart of Chicago. She loves the quirky aura and the light that flows from windows to wood floors. She and Anita (Ransom's Resident Assistant) are like sisters vacationing together, planning warrior races and other questionable activities.

Ava Lou 3 (Haack), our youngest granddaughter, captures a universe of personality in her little body, giving us slivers of the image of God even as she wrecks havoc. The other day she found a spent water softener filter waiting to be trashed. She used it to spread filthy rust over her face and neck for a new, fashionable tan look.



Wild-child Ava Lou

There is so much more, but this will have to do. . .

Final Notes

Invisible Work

- Yesterday it was 6 degrees when we drove past a neighbor's house and saw a man standing on the roof of the porch. His van was parked below and he was replacing a second floor window. He had removed his gloves to be better able to horse the new window into the old hole.
- On Friday the mailman rang our doorbell. "Hi, Margie," he said, "I have a package for you. You have a happy New Year, now." It was blowing snow and he wore ear muffs. I don't know his name.
- The day before, early in the morning, even before light, I heard the yelp of the garbage truck brakes. The bang of our cart being lifted and dumped. I rarely see this man, but every week I see evidence: my trash bins are empty.
- Poet Mary Gordon is also doing her work with words and doing it well. She helps me see more clearly, listen more closely. She makes me say, thank you, thank you, to you and you and you. She blesses and inspires me to keep on with my own work – much of it hidden. Invisible. Might it remain invisible? Probably. For most of us. Still, we say thank you.



For Those Whose Work Is Invisible

For those who paint the undersides of boats,
Makers of ornamental drains on roofs – too high to be seen,
Cobblers who labor over inner soles,
Seamstresses who stitch the wrong sides of linings,
For scholars whose research leads to no obvious discovery,
For dentists who polish each gold surface of the fillings of upper molars,
For civil engineers and those who repair water mains,
For electricians, for artists who suppress what does injustice to their visions,
For surgeons whose sutures are things of beauty..
For all those whose work is for Your eye only,
Who labor for Your entertainment or their own,
Who sleep in peace or do not sleep in peace, knowing their efforts are unknown.
Protect them from downheartedness – and from diseases of the eye.
Grant them perseverance, for the sake of Your love, which is humble, invisible and heedless of reward.

–Mary Gordon, *Acceptable Words*.

May God hold you in the midst of your Everyday.

Warmly,

About Notes from Toad Hall

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 them, a midwestern Gothic four-square looked amazingly like a mansion. Possibly even as great a house as Toad Hall.

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