

# Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 3 **Summer Into Fall 2017**



## Dear Friends,

Although I'm dedicating this letter to Katy B. who has begun a dangerous journey, please come along, all of you, for none of us knows at what point ours will end. Let's all pray we arrive slathered with God's lavish grace.

## Two guys and a race

I recently learned that a writer I respect and love died last month from brain cancer. In 2014, he published a book of prayers you *need* to get – *A Book of Uncommon Prayers: 100 Celebrations of the Miracle and Muddle of the Ordinary* by Brian Doyle. I always look for his essays in a lit magazine I get, but it has been about a year since anything appeared. Now I see why.



I'm hoping he has knocked into my friend Ed Hague whom I think he would like a lot because they are two of a kind. Both were mortally wounded by cancer and yet found their way to a New and Unending life. They are both funny, real, and dish out piercing insights on life. They are probably creating some mayhem up there.



*Did you know: Baby otters hold paws so they don't drift apart?*

Doyle's book included *The Last Prayer*. It had to be either uncannily prophetic or possibly one he wrote after his diagnosis?

*Dear Coherent Mercy:*  
*Thanks. Best life ever. Personally I never thought a cool woman would come close to understanding me, let alone understanding me but liking me anyway, but that happened! And You and I both remember that doctor in Boston saying polite but businesslike that we would not have children but then came three children fast and furious! And no man ever had better friends, and no man ever had a happier childhood and wilder brothers and a sweeter sister, and I was that rare guy who not only loved but liked his parents and loved sitting and drinking tea and listening to them! And You let me write some books that weren't half bad, and I got to have a career that actually no kidding helped some kids wake up to their best selves, and no one ever laughed more at the ocean of hilarious things in this world, or gaped more in astonishment at the wealth of miracles everywhere every*

*moment. I could complain a little right here about the long years of back pain and the occasional awful heartbreak, but Lord, those things were infinitesimal against the slather of gifts You gave mere me, a muddle of a man, so often selfish and small. But no man was ever more grateful for Your profligate generosity, and here at the very end, here in my last lines, I close my eyes and weep with joy that I was alive, and blessed beyond measure, and might well be headed back home to the incomprehensible Love from which I came, mewling, many years ago. But hey, listen, can I ask one last favor? If I am sent back for another life, can I meet my lovely bride again? In whatever form? Could we be hawks, or otters maybe? And can we have the same kids again if possible? And if I get one friend again, can I have my buddy Pete? He was a huge guy in this life – make him the biggest otter ever, and I'll know him right away okay? Thanks Boss. Thanks from the bottom of my heart. See You soon. Remember – otters. Otters rule. And so: amen.*

I was also looking at some of Ed Hague's final messages and include a few on the last page of this Letter. One of his was also a prayer. I don't know if he wrote it himself or found it somewhere. He'd just gone into hospice and was only going to live a few more days.

People like Brian and Ed have become part of the "great cloud of witnesses" that keep me determined to make it to

the end. It's not just that they ran the race well but their lives included everyday thankfulness and joy mixed with the suffering and mess of life, including the unexpected and the hilarious. They make me slap my cheek: *MARGIE! Pick up your stupid feet and keep walking.* (Need. Holy Spirit help, of course.)

### **Heartbreak trouble**

I sit in my comfortable chair. A mug of coffee beside me. My slippers are lamb's wool and leather. A fan softly cools the warming air. Bird song is so loud it's audible through closed windows. The Bible is propped open just so. I'm reading John. It is the third day after Jesus died and Mary is sobbing. Heartbroken because he is gone. Disappeared. No one knows where.

Mary had reached that point in life, the day when it looks as if all you've hoped for – all the good you've imagined has turned to ash. Most of us have experienced such a day or even years. I only know a couple people whose lives are golden. I'm nonplussed and wonder if I should



help them by arranging a bit of trouble. Really, how are they going to cope on the day their roof caves in if they've had no practice? So, most of us understand Mary because we have joined her at one time or another in weeping because of some one or something we've lost.

The world is pretty ugly with loss these days. Babies gassed in Syria. Coptic churches bombed. Immigrants trapped and baked to death in a closed semi truck in San Antonio. You don't need CNN video



*Morning rituals.*

clips to break your heart when a two year old washes up on shore. The trouble we witness is ages old. Sadly, nothing new.

Even closer to my heart: a friend's prostate cancer has been up-ticked to stage four. Another dear friend, mother of two young ones, suddenly learns an aggressive breast cancer is attacking both sides and gobbling lymph nodes. Yesterday she was fine. Denis' mother sobs every day for her dead husband. She can't remember where he's gone or how he abused her. She just wants him back.

Speaking of pain, my right wrist is about as useless as a club. Good thing I'm left-handed. Our home needs a new roof; if insurance doesn't cover it, we have no money to fix it.

One week's worth of troubles. Some devastating, some not so big, but enough to give us pause and wonder is Jesus with us? Is he nearby?

I'm still in my chair finishing a cup of cold pressed Java Estate Taman Dadar described as

soft, smooth, dusty, chocolate, low acidity. Good grief. Some part of me thinks *shouldn't you be ashamed of yourself? Is it because your personal suffering is so small it allows you to calmly rock and drink as you watch the sky flame apricot?*

## **NO Accusations today**

I hush myself. No recriminations allowed

today. My face drinks the rising sun because as I read on, in the next moment Jesus finds Mary on that day of grief and the whole universe goes viral with joy. He is risen! With every cell of my being, I believe Jesus will find *all* his dears – no matter how far our ashes scatter or how deeply our bodies are buried in the Earth's rubble. With quiet anticipation I know something powerful is building on earth, in the galaxy, the universe, and one day this Savior, this Lamb we know as Jesus, will turn feral and fierce.



*The sky over the lake really was apricot.*

Isn't it a little ironic that the tender lover St. John who above told us about Mary getting found by Jesus and who later wrote the book of Revelation with the eye of one who actually saw the future and knows that for all the suffering that exists there is a terrible recompense coming, an unstoppable fury – a time when the Christ of God will destroy all those who destroy the earth and his people? This hope of all things coming round to wellness can seem remote and my comprehension is faulty and slow. But where else can we turn other than to this Lamb? Like iron filings to a magnet my cells cling to him. They are all, every one of them, betting on Jesus. Pay off is coming!

*That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, "No future bliss can make up for it" not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.*

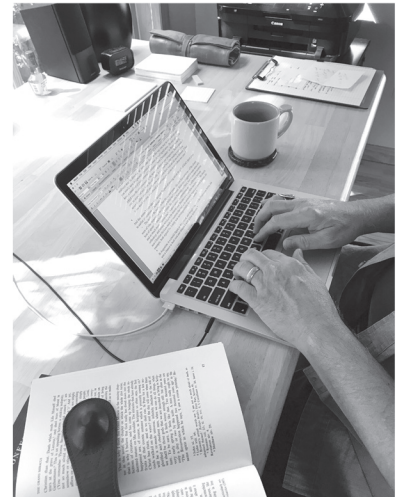
–C.S. Lewis, The Great Divorce

# Ransom *Notes*

## Called to the ordinary

Summer is a busy time, though I always imagine that this year our summer will be *quiet, restful* and almost boring. One of the things Ransom has always tried to champion is the conviction that God has not called us to the extraordinary but to faithfulness in the ordinary and the routine. He does extraordinary things, of course, because he is God. His calling to us, however, is not beyond us and it allows us to live in the ordinary where we discover his grace.

That doesn't mean that being faithful in our ordinary is always easy or simple. As if we needed a reminder of this, God answered Denis' prayer for his mother—that she would outlive his father who didn't allow him to spend time with her. Since his father's death in April, he's enjoyed bringing her to The House Between each Sunday and visiting her at the care center another day each week. It's a delight, but it means a day and a half each week that we used to have for other things are now committed to being with her.



*Denis' writing habitat*

## Say Yes and No

You can't say Yes to something without saying No to something else—but what? Life is complicated. God answers prayer and in the process gives more to pray about. We can sometimes laugh at the messiness of reality and learn to accept that our Father is unwilling to make our ordinary so smooth and routine we don't have reason to pray.

## In the available moments

We both try to carve out every available moment to write. There is always a next issue of *Letters from the House Between* and *Critique* to work on. And I'm writing a sequel to *The Exact Place*. Since Denis lives here he's heard snatches and can promise I haven't lost my touch. (Yay!) On the other hand, he enters the story in this volume and is slightly nervous wondering what I'll include, and how I'll talk about the time he...

**The three of us meet** as a staff team each week to pray.

- To pray for our work, our writing, Ransom's financial needs (as usual, giving to Ransom drops considerably each summer). For the guests we host.
- To pray for you who are on our mail list: That you would know grace, be a person of hope, and be encouraged in your work and relationships. And I adjure you to find times of refreshment and rest during these warm days of summer.

**Speaking of "adjure;"** would you go to Ransom's website and consider signing up for email updates? We promise to protect your privacy, not blow up your inbox and never use your info for any other purpose. [www.ransomfellowship.org](http://www.ransomfellowship.org)



# FamilyNotes



*Beautiful Katy*

As we move through the summer months there are times that have made us glad to be alive. That may sound gloomy. But you know how life is. Today everything wonderful, the next blown over by a sidewind. Am thinking of my dear friend Katy Bowser Hutson who is being treated for an aggressive form of breast cancer. The first time I met her, she and Kenny were invited to our house for dinner with a group of friends. When she left I impulsively gave her a hat I'd crocheted. (That winter I was turning them out like a machine. Just for fun.) That did it. We bonded for good. Now just the other day she asked if I would make another one for her. Just because. Because we love each other and because she has started chemo therapy. Please pray for her.

Meanwhile, in July we visited Wyoming – staying in the old Occidental Hotel in Buffalo – a cool, cool town. We also went to a national rodeo. First time ever – a whooping big event. Watching the beautiful horses and the breakneck riding brought back memories of youthful horseback riding. My brother and I used to race our horses in spite of Dad's warning not to. Once they started – it was like horse crack – they get around another horse and all they want is to run.



*Gorgeous eggs*



*Lovely Eudora*

Then there are my young hens. They make me laugh almost every day. They are named after women writers. Eudora is the essence of henishness, round, shy and dignified – a barred rock. Flannery is a flamboyant black-laced Wyandotte, and I'm still on the fence about her as *she* may be a *he*. Jane and Anne are reds. The other day I found Jane at the neighbor's garage sale sitting on a chair and eating cheese. This is an egregious violation of my rules! One of them has begun laying eggs, brown eggs, thrilling

eggs, eggs for every occasion. I suspect Eudora. Bless her! I didn't think this would happen until late September. I will be posting a video of them on my blog on Ransom's website. Take a look and wish you had some of your own!

# And Finally...

Until he died in 2015, Ed Hague was a beloved member of Ransom's Board. These were some of Ed's last messages to us as he ended treatment for prostate cancer:

*Dr. Sartor: I think we're done, Ed.*

*Ed: I agree.*

*Dr. Sartor: this seems important for me to say – I love you, Ed.*

*Ed: I love you too, Oliver. Thank you for fighting so hard for me.*

And then to me:

*Hospice coming tomorrow.*

A couple days later this: I don't know if it was a prayer or a poem he wrote or was he quoting someone else? I've added punctuation and breaks:

*Hold fast dear friend,*

*Brother, comrade, pastor, shepherd, captain, who goes before us to cross this Last Sea of "sorrowful yet rejoicing," compelled in the Spirit of Reepicheep to reach the end of the world, where all that is said, seen and fleshly slips away, and all that has been unseen and eternal rises like some great continent: Go ahead of us and find us a place at the great banquet table where one day together we shall raise our glasses of the sweet spiced wine of the Covenant, where our King has found it fit to write His promises upon our hearts and he has surely carved you in the palm of His hand.*

A day later:

*Started morphine an hour ago. Medic!!*

Next day:

*...based upon how I'm doing with my morphine dosage – Give me a call, and if I'm conscious I will pick up.*

I sent this and from then on he was quiet:

*Thou, who has showed me great and sore troubles shall quicken me again, and shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shall increase my greatness and comfort me on every side. (Ps. 71:20,21) May you be soothed to sleep. G'night, Ed, my favorite druggie. Love mlh.*

Not long after:

*Hey, Margie, this is Betsy. Ed's been unable to tend to correspondence this last week. I wanted you to know he took the dreaded turn for the worse yesterday afternoon. He's been laboring ever since as he has slipped into unconsciousness. We anticipate his passing sometime tonight. These last 6 days have been extraordinarily rich and blessed. I know I can send you his deep love for you all. I look forward to seeing you soon.*



Thankful for those who will ever shine so bright,



*Ed Hague 1957~ 2015*

## 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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