

Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 2 **Spring 2018**



A few days after Easter

It is very windy today. I can hear it whooshing past the house. The sky is bright with sunshine but the air is cracking cold. The bare, black limbs of the trees sway outside my window. The crows have landed on the rocking branches and are making a racket as they have spied something down in the ravine that concerns them. What it is, I can't tell. Crows are nature's alarm calls warning danger away. I've watched an owl – apparently crows don't like owls, especially a large, gray-barred owl – who sat nonchalantly on a branch ignoring their raucous calls. I've seen the crows follow a coyote through the woods, flying from tree to

tree screeching obscenities while she pays them no heed as she slinks into the dense undergrowth.

Like crows, we often observe danger coming from many directions and in spite of our cries and threats we aren't able to scare it away for good. No. We often feel quite helpless in the face of things that threaten to take us down.



Crows alarm calls: danger!

One of the collects from the Easter Vigil remains lodged in my heart, and I pray it for myself, for others:

“O God, you know that we are set in the midst of so many and grave dangers that in the frailty of our nature we cannot stand upright: Grant us your strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through every temptation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.”

Two weeks after Easter

It is Friday, April 13, and the weather people, who are notoriously alarmist, predict we

are heading into an epic storm. I do not believe them. Except for small piles of snow in our front yard that had once been white mountains, the days are hinting of spring, the ground in its brown bareness is visible everywhere, even down through the woods and ravines behind us. Water drips and runs in rivulets past the house and down the hill.

However, I begin paying attention as the wind spikes, the pine trees bow up and down and the sky spits rain. Being a Faux Chicken Farmer, I hurry out to check on my hens who are doing just fine. They greet me with their normal greediness for the kitchen scraps I

carry. I am concerned they might get wet and cold from rain and sleet since I'd removed the plastic from their door in the mistaken notion that spring was here and they need more fresh air.

Then I notice the plastic covering on the back wall is torn and whipping like a flag in the wind so I scurry to duct tape it down hoping the temporary fix will hold during the storm.

That night it rained and sleeted for the next twelve hours. On Saturday morning it turned to snow.

About 10 A.M. I run to check on the girls again and find a small snow drift has built up inside their

door, but the back plastic is still holding. They were all chipper and had even bothered to lay their daily eggs, although Eudora is annoyed and pecked me when I reach under her. (She was still on the nest inspecting the eggs and wasn't ready to move off.) I quickly clean out their roosting hutch, fill the feeder and the waterer. They are as tucked in and ready for the storm as they can be.

All day the snow has piled. We fill the bird feeders. As they bounce and sway in the snow squalls, all our regulars frantically vacuum up the seeds as if there is no tomorrow. Fine with us. They squabble and collide mid-air, and even the gentle doves are nasty to one another. The sweet juncos with their small dusky bodies, white breasts, and creamy beaks are coming in flocks. They are mostly ground feeders and have a comical way of lightly bouncing along the surface of the snow doing little double-footed back kicks to uncover fallen seeds.



Into the storm

Twenty-four hours of snow and harsh wind have turned to forty-eight and I wonder where these dear little creatures will find safe places to rest. Sometime late Saturday afternoon with snow piled high in drifts I look out our bedroom window and notice the small gap between the wall and the evergreen hedge below. The tops of the shrubs are solid umbrellas of snow, but beneath them a network of branches form a shelter that is almost cozy. A sudden movement catches my eye and several juncos appear, hopping into the branches and hanging from the twigs in complete refuge from the storm. On the ground beneath them, another revelation: tracks prove that even wild bunnies are finding protection right under my bedroom window.

Prayers, analogies and other metaphors

I apologize for my fondness of analogies, but I can't help it. It has always been like this: I love them. And metaphors, and comparisons because they are reminders from life that lead me directly back to the creator. And during the days of the storm the reminders were compelling.

Each time we read together from the book *Common Prayer – A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, the liturgy ends with a prayer we say together which goes like this:



Buried.

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you; wherever he may send you:

May he guide you through the wilderness: *protect you through the storm;*

May he bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders he has shown you; May he bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.

So there it was. The link. The analogy. The storm. The need for protection. The desire for Home and reasons to rejoice. It had been a difficult week. And I am *so aware* there are degrees of difficulty and mine hardly move the gauge for anyone but me. Again, my apologies to those of you whose difficulties are far worse! But the way of it for us was: on that Monday before the storm we had moved Denis' mother to a memory care center only five minutes from us. (What an improvement just in commuting time. For example, whenever we had her come to our house for her weekly outing, there and back twice took two hours from the day.) Her move had taken a lot of planning and time for Anita and me. It's tons

better than the previous dismal place where she has been living for two years. Now her room is clean and cheery and bright. It has new comforts, ones she'd been without ever since she'd moved into that old nursing home. The staff are skilled and friendly. The food is better. We told ourselves this would be good for her. We reminded ourselves that any change

for a person suffering dementia causes more confusion and setbacks. Still, I wasn't prepared for it to be so much worse. She has cried continuously. She sits in her darkened room and refuses to join any activities. She doesn't like the residents and considers the staff with suspicion and anger.

Adding to the stormy week I came down with a vicious stomach flu and for a few days I really thought now would be a good time to depart this life.

Safely shut-in

The blizzard snowbound us for two days, but gifted us with stunning views of a snow-covered world and forced quietness upon us. Looking around we could only wonder and appreciate the amazing shelter we have. And not only that, I had time to ponder a God who guides even the smallest creatures to places of shelter in the storm. He gives hope that the ugly storms we face in life contain some kind of refuge where God protects us from the perils that threaten to undo us. (Please don't

(continued from page 3)

hear me saying that tired old adage “When God closes a door he always opens a window.” Please!) But I loved this reminder. It was like pressing the “reset button” and getting a new vision – finding that yes, indeed, I have been protected. I actually found strength to get out of bed and stand upright. There was much to rejoice over. I need the prayers, the shelter, the juncos and the rabbits hiding under the hedge. I need God to see us through that door rejoicing. I’m sure you need him, too. And so, amen.

Family Notes

Perhaps the most consuming family-time these days has been care for Denis’ mother who is 94. I understand that many of you know what it’s like to care for an aging parent – and in this case, one with dementia. Lately she thinks she’s been baking treats for all the events held at the center and although the other residents like her cookies, they don’t really want to be friends. It is sometimes hilarious, but most of the time it leaves us, especially Denis, feeling sad. As I mentioned earlier, change can increase confusion and stress, but we rolled with it and she’s more settled now.

In March, when Anita and I began hunting for a Memory Care center closer to us we didn’t realize that while we might find a place that looked promising, there could still be a long waiting period to get in. So one day when we were out looking at possibilities, we received a call from a housing counselor who told

us a space had just opened, and if we came by right then we could look at it. It turned out to be Valley Ridge, just five minutes from us and available as soon as we could move her! AND, bonus! It was less expensive than the place she was in. We were thrilled seeing this as evidence of God’s grace, and we couldn’t stop grinning and exclaiming.

On May 5 we took her to Cinco de Mayo which must have been a first for her sheltered life – the bright dresses, the tattoos, the mariachi bands and even masked Mexican wrestlers who she thought were stupid. We hoped the day would stimulate her and not hasten her demise. She was a good sport but stuck to old-fashioned American hot dogs and Tom Thumb Donuts. No burritos for her!

I’ve been dragging around with RA flares lately. My hands look dangerous with swollen joints and big knuckles like street fighting is my new hobby. I’m waiting for insurance to approve a costly new medication that might (it better!) help. It’d be lovely if my hands quit waking me at night – one less interruption to sleep. O, crabby me!

Every day we are thankful for our home – the beauty of the woods, the birds, the sunshine that pours into our offices. For hens that lay gorgeous jumbo eggs. As long as we can live here it will bless us. If the time comes after retirement when we can no longer stay here? Then God will help us move on to the next place. If so I may have prematurely named this *The House Between*, ha.



Cinco de Mayo with Denis’ mother

Ransom Notes

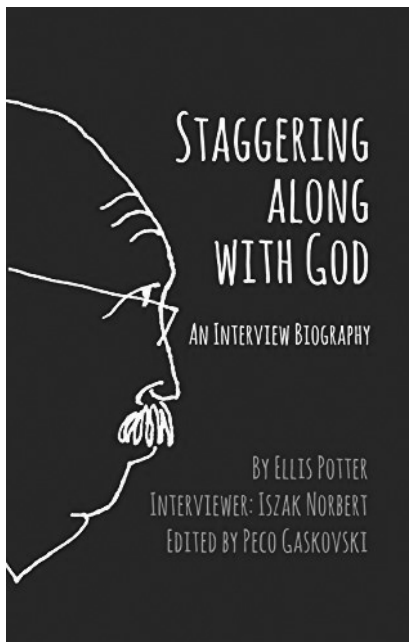
Staggering along with God

Summer often arrives in Minnesota like it was shot from a pistol. High of 43 one day and 85 the next. In approximately three days the color of the earth sped from brown to brilliant green. Spring is always a reminder that what looks dead is only waiting for resurrection. Given that this year is our 37th year of ministry the metaphor applies! Ransom keeps cycling through the lean and the green.

We continue with writing projects. Since the beginning of the year I've put out an issue of *Letters from the House Between* and here is Issue #2. Denis has published two *Critique* and is working on #3. Both of us continue work on our manuscripts. Denis sees the end in sight for the manuscript on faithfulness in a pluralistic world. He hopes to be done by July and ready to send to a publisher.

My next memoir moves at the pace of a tortoise. If I didn't spend so much time chastising myself for being slow I might make more progress. I've set an artificial date hoping to be mostly done by the end of November. In order to get some idea of where I'm at, I did a word count of how much I'd written so far. A dangerous undertaking, really. I was encouraged – as of April 30 it's at 40,000 words. The average book length is around 65,000. So it's getting there despite my doubts.

In September Denis has agreed to speak at the Francis Schaeffer Lectures at Covenant Seminary.



In October we will be doing a fall retreat for City Church of East Nashville. (Our good friends Kenny and Katy Hutson are members.)

Ransom's income since the beginning of 2018 has been low. We've been here before, and God has provided, so it is time to pray not fear. Pray God would lead us as we continue to trust in his provision

or to change plans for the year. Either way we walk by faith. We admit being influenced by L'Abri's vision regarding finances. Ellis Potter writes in his new book *Staggering Along with God*:

"The main work [of L'Abri] is to live and to trust and to wait to see what God shows you day by day. The finances of L'Abri are deliberately precarious, so that if God would be finished with L'Abri it could close within a month or two. There is no backup. ... L'Abri has no business plan at all, which ... makes you really insecure,

which can be healthy, because you know constantly how much you need God; and the other thing is, when the bills are paid at the end of the month, it's a miracle, and you rejoice, thanking God. Most economists would predict L'Abri's imminent demise, because "you just can't live like that."

Ransom has basically followed these principles for 37 years and "has lived like that." So, yes, we attest to this: miracles do happen.

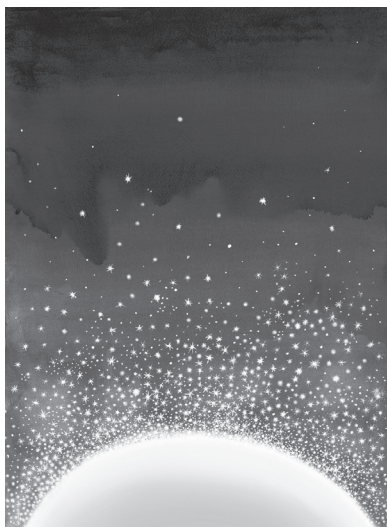
And Finally...

High five for the work you do

Yesterday two young men showed up to wash our second story windows. They accomplished in an hour what would have taken me all day; (if I could climb a 25 foot ladder) our windows sparkled and the outside world glowed with clarity. How important is it to wash windows and do them well? Some would say not very. But I went online and gave this company Five Stars and praise for the boys who did the work.

Often it's the exceptional and the sensational that receives the "Well Done!" The other day we watched a news segment about Bill and Melinda Gates who have spent more than a billion dollars helping 22,000 low income students

of all races get to college and beyond – all expenses paid. Some were too emotional to respond to the interviewer. Beyond incredible!



Little stars, big fireworks.

that happened when Christ burst out of the tomb ... The stars keep shooting off as more people come to Christ, and more people show His glory, in tiny hidden ways as well as in the big, flashy ways as they show their trust in Him."

In tiny hidden ways? I'd maybe like to be an atomic explosion. Maybe. But to realize the inclusive nature of "small and great alike" means we are *in* – however small or great, and the measure of our success is related to what we do with what we have. That's always been the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, the way of a little boy's lunch becoming food for thousands. We can either compare ourselves to the Gates and give up or recognize the choice to use what we do have to serve others.



Moving ahead in tiny flashes,

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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