

Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 4 **Winter 2018**



Dear Friends,

While we were away in October for our vacation, I expected to review the milestones of Fifty Years of Marriage. Isn't that what people do who survive that long? We would recount the ways God cared for us through the years. The best of times and the worst. And you would be so blessed. Merry Christmas.

That didn't happen. Our holiday in Maine, the aspiration of a lifetime, was like all the other days and years of our life. A few were legend. Others we would have been happy to skip. Most were just what you'd expect from normal everyday life.

The passing days

We were surrounded by fragrant pine forest, the sky, the sea and its tides, and the lobster boats that chugged past daily pausing to pull and rebait their traps. The lovely home loaned to us by good friends Richard and Jane Winter was anchored to the rocky shore making us feel like we were safe in Jesus' parable of the house built on the rock. The glassed-in living room reached out over the water at high tide looking as if we were sailing away on a ship. One morning as I looked out the window two gorgeous red fox with black points and bushy white-tipped tails meandered through the yard. Much of what we saw were cameos from God's stunning creation and a feast for the heart.

When the wind blew with gale force across the water and temperatures dropped it was a challenge to stay warm beside the wood stove with hot tea, but a bed piled high with down comforters thawed our old bones at night.



Low tide

We enjoyed quaint New England villages, a harbor tour of lighthouses, and the Wyeth museum. We had waited all year to have our favorite seafood – lobster rolls for D, and fried clams with bellies for me. Sadly, in a few hours, the clams left in a stampede and I vowed that was the end of that.

There were some unwelcome reminders of our age and mortality. One day, as we crossed a parking lot Denis, who never falls, fell. After lying on the ground a few minutes he rose with a wrenched knee and bruised palm. We were reminded of a friend's mantra: Your only job as an old person is to not fall. If you fall, you will break your hip. If you break your hip you will go to the hospital. If you go to the hospital you will get pneumonia, if you get pneumonia you will die. (Thank you, Dr. Larry Bergstrom.) Sadly, that wasn't his only fall. One night he stepped out to see the stars on the multi-level deck. Forgetting where he was as he looked to the heavens he stepped forward and fell to the ground cutting his ear on a branch on the way down. I was alarmed and very concerned, at the same time I felt less alone because now it's one more thing we share. How wonderful to not be the only one doing face plants.

Years of growth

It isn't easy to assess my growth through the years. But I can attest to Denis'. Even in the last couple he has grown kinder and more patient. Over the years what has meant the most again and again was his desire to follow God. Most couples are a little testy about sharpening

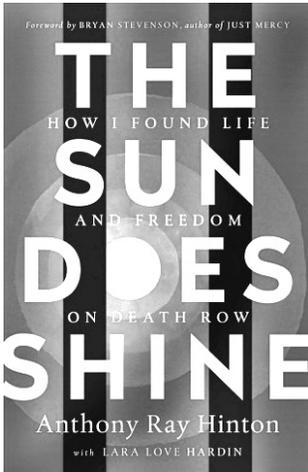
one another for the good and we've each had times with the other in our cross hairs. When all the excuses and defensiveness are stripped away the question remains: Do you want to serve God and grow or not? Somehow, by God's mercy we have responded yes. That has always been a source of encouragement to both of us. So even our vacation reminded us that the sum of our days and years, when distilled together



Sailing away on high tide

are evidence not of life filled with sensational events and astonishing accomplishments – but more of the ordinary everyday ways we have of living with and loving one another: Evidence of purposefully picking ourselves up off the ground and going on day after day and experiencing a few extraordinary glimpses of God's creation and evidence of his love in the quietness of small things. Like warm popovers and a cup of coffee. All of life is wrapped in the ordinary trials and joys of life even a celebration of Fifty Years of Marriage.

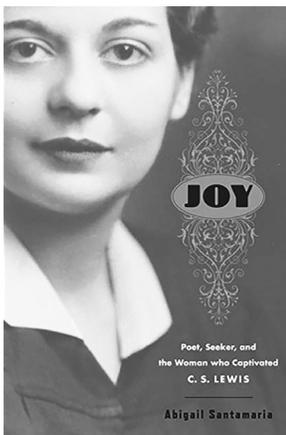
Christmas Gift List 2018



The Sun Does Shine by Anthony Ray Hinton, 2018, St. Martin's Press (Memoir)

It is impossible to imagine what it's like to be accused of a crime you didn't commit, be sentenced to death, and then wait on death row for thirty years. There was no help for Anthony Hinton until attorney Bryan Stevenson (who wrote *Just Mercy*), after years of fighting the Alabama justice system, won his freedom. When Hinton was first arrested for murder he was certain justice would prevail. He was employed at a factory where employees

were locked in during their night shift. There was incontrovertible physical evidence he couldn't have been anywhere near the crime. Later he recounted protesting his innocence to the arresting officer. The response was: "I don't care whether *you* did or didn't do it. In fact, I believe you didn't do it. But it doesn't matter. If you didn't do it, one of your brothers did. And you're going to take the rap." Thirty years later he was freed without any apology or compensation from the government for having stolen 30 years of his life. Hinton's well-written story is heartbreaking and heartening. In spite of his soul crushing years without hope he came out a man determined not to allow bitterness to control his life. He has forgiven his enemies because, as he says, "I forgive because I have a God who forgives." In every way, this book is my **top pick for the year**.



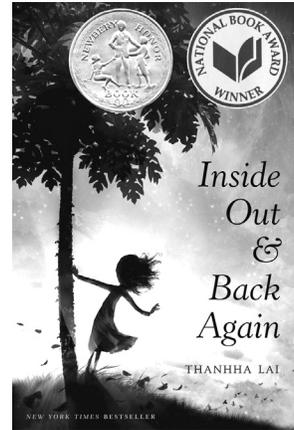
Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C.S. Lewis by Abigail Santamaria, Houghton Mifflin, 2015. (Biography)

Among the many works written about Joy Davidman who became C.S. Lewis' wife, this biography is outstanding. I've read quite a few and thought I'd pass this one up. I'm glad I didn't because I couldn't put it down. With extraordinary new documents and intense research Santamaria has written a riveting account of Joy's life from her childhood to her

death from cancer. Joy was a complicated, brilliant woman and although her faults and eccentricities are obvious, there is plenty to convince you of the reasons Lewis found her fascinating and eventually fell in love with her. Even Walter Hooper, Lewis' secretary who had always felt ambivalent to her felt his heart changed after reading this book. He admitted he understood Joy in a new way and that it was no wonder C.S. loved her. I think because we have loved Lewis so much, his brilliant mind, his ability to speak with passion and truth about the faith, the children's books that fasten all our hearts to his genius, we wonder what about this woman caused his heart to break in grief after her death. This book will explain why.

Inside Out and Back Again

by Thanhha Lai, Harper, 2011. Ages 9 and up. (Newberry Honor Book)



As our country debates the problem of immigrants, this poignant book explores the life of a young Vietnamese girl in gorgeously poetic prose to tell what it's like to have all you've known torn from your life and be forced to begin life

again. In 1975 Kim Hà, a ten-year-old girl living in Saigon, becomes a refugee of war. Terrifying events have scorched everything familiar from her life, turning it inside out and upside down. Slowly, slowly in new, foreign ways it's put back together again.

Hà's life had been a sweet-and-sour mix. The sweetness of family, home, flaming bougainvillea vines, and the luscious fruit of papaya. The sour is missing her father who left on navy assignment and was never heard from again. Finally, awfully, they flee Vietnam. Hà, her mother, and brothers encounter intense dangers, sorrows and miseries as they escape to a refugee camp in Guam and from there to Alabama.

Hà discovers America has sweet and sour, too. A kind host who looks like a cowboy. A monstrously difficult language with funny sounds and rules. Showers in the bathroom that feel like a tender massage of rain. Teasing and bullying at school, but generosity and kindness from neighbors. Somehow, Hà must learn to embrace this new configuration of life.

This review was condensed from my favorite website for children's books:

www.orangemarmaladebooks.com.

Virgil Wander

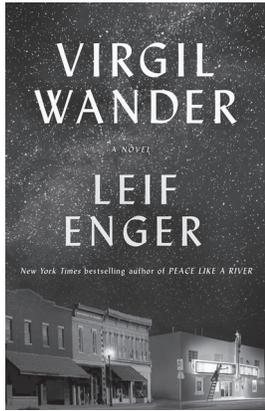
by Leif Enger,
Atlantic Monthly
Press, 2018.
(Fiction)

One of my all-time
favorite authors,
writer of *Peace
Like A River*, has
a new book. Who
doesn't love a
story set in your
own geographical

setting? I do. And yet like all great books, it
doesn't matter if you don't live on the shore
of the largest inland fresh water sea – Lake

Superior. Enger takes us to the land, to a
hard-luck town, to the soul of the people who
live there. On a snowy slippery day, Virgil
Wander drives his car off a the road and into
the icy lake. Fortunately, he was saved, but
unfortunately his mild brain injury alters his
memory. As he pieces together his personal

history he becomes involved in solving the
mysterious disappearance of a native son. The
characters are woven together with charm
and humor, from the missing son's father who
is a kite flying, pipe smoking old Norwegian
who shows up from the Arctic to Galen Pea, a
young ragamuffin determined to hook a killer
fish. All help steer a journey into the heart
and heartache of Greenstone, Minnesota, a
struggling, hard-scrabble Midwestern town.



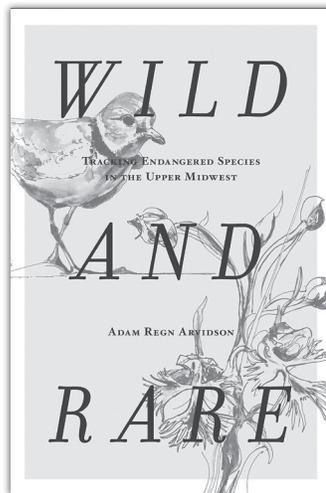
Wild and Rare: Tracking Endangered Species in the Upper Midwest by Adam Arvidson, Minnesota Historical Society, 2018. (Non-fiction, nature)

What makes any species whether plant or animal “Endangered?” There are many requirements, government laws, organizations and research that make this a complex world. Each chapter describes a particular species that is wild and rare and what makes it so. The book explores the complexity and unintended consequences of human choices affecting the environment. Population density, farming and other practices can contribute to the collapse of species – think about the honey bee and other pollinators.

Some chapters are utterly fascinating as he searches for and describes the species. The book is golden when you learn a bobcat will run from you, but a lynx stares at you with feline eyes and melts away when it wants. And the prairie orchid, so rare researchers never reveal their

exact location because collectors will steal it for private collections. And the Topeka shiner – a tiny minnow losing its battle for existence because streams that shelter it have been channeled and changed. And even the timber wolf, oddly, the only animal with a long history of being the kill target of humans.

He raises questions for anyone interested in creation care such as why does the preservation of rare species matter? Arvidson poses some thoughtful answers to questions well worth considering.



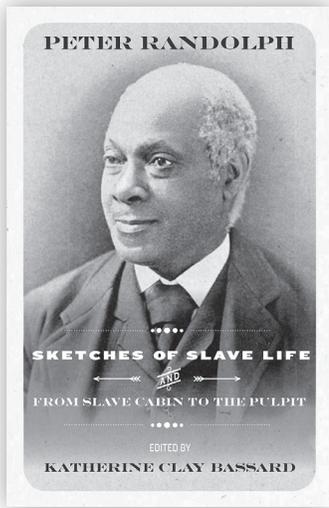
Now I Lay Me Down To Fight by Katy Bowser Hutson,
www.katyhutson.com, 2018. (poetry)

What do you do if you wake up one day to find your breasts are insanely on-fire with a vicious invader who plans to kill you unless you take the chemo journey without so much as a promise of survival? Because you are young, a wife and a mother with hopes of living for other stories, you have no choice. You take the journey. And if you are a poet you “walk this poisonous way” hoping, praying, negotiating and writing all the while. In this collection Katy moves through the halls of medicine and the corridors of pain to find

she is at times only a “tiny speck of glory, barely sparking,” but one carried in the arms of Jesus. Out of the crucible of inflammatory breast cancer comes this rare collection of poems sure to be a comfort to any who have cussed, fought and cried their way through an unwanted diagnosis or any of the other griefs common to humankind. When Katy decided to publish her poems she began a Kickstarter program. What thrilled all who know her was that contributions grew far past the initial goal. It was an indication of not only our love for her, but our confidence in the quality of her artistry. I'm delighted to recommend this little book, to any who suffer from cancer or know someone who has. Limited copies are available through www.katyhutson.com at \$15.00 apiece.

Sketches of Slave Life & From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit

by Peter Randolph, edited by Katherine Basard, West Virginia University Press, 2016. (Autobiography)



Peter Randolph was born a slave, emancipated in 1847 by his owner. In an unusual move, the plantation owner ruled that all his slaves should be freed upon his death. In spite of the legality of the will, it took three years and a lengthy court fight to gain their release. Eventually, they landed in Boston to begin a new life in a white culture that still saw them as undesirable citizens.

After hearing this in book in audio form, I wanted a hard copy to read over again. I've read other books about the lives of slaves, watched movies, heard lectures, however, this historical biography of a specific man's courage, his determination to learn to read as a boy, his transition to freedom, and his

eventual training to become a pastor is made more powerful by the footnotes and corroborated sources. Despite having suffered the terrifying effects of unimaginable mental, spiritual and physical abuse he survived to become a man of God loving and living his life in service to others. I can't describe the sadness, the joy, the admiration I have for this man who, though now in heaven, is my brother. He is a great hero. I urge you to read the book.

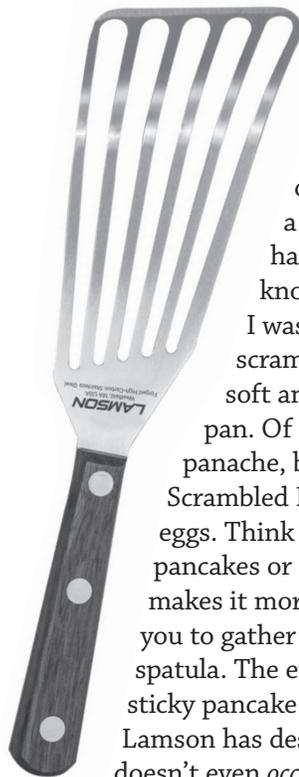


Porter's Gate Work Songs CD (<https://www.portersgateworship.com>)

C. S. Lewis famously complained in *God in the Dock* that when he first came to faith he found church music to be "fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music." The music in this CD, in sharp contrast, embodies keen biblical theology expressed in lively lyrics set to lovely music.

The Porter's Gate: *Work Songs* celebrates the biblical insight that our vocations are never incidental to faith but essential. The work of our hands and feet and imaginations, regardless of what we do in our callings, is kingdom work done to God's glory. Robert Berman says, "This is profound reflection on the lives to which Christ calls us, as well as being art well worth supporting on its musical merits."

The creative artist behind *The Porter's Gate* project is Isaac Wardell, director of worship arts at Trinity Presbyterian in Charlottesville, Virginia. For *Work Songs* he brought together an impressive list of musicians including Audrey Assad, Aaron Keys, Joy Ike, Josh Garrels, and David Gungor. This Cd is already a year old, but I'm betting there are still folks who haven't had the joy of hearing it. If you don't own it – get it. If you do? There must be someone you know who would enjoy this CD.



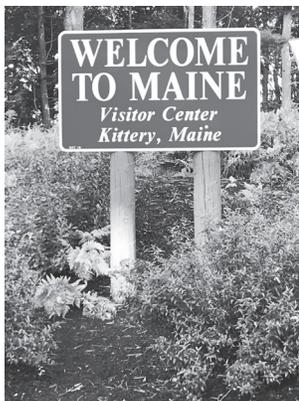
Lamson slotted fish spatula (Left-handed kitchen utensil)

Why ever would I include a spatula in my gift list? Most kitchen gadgets are a useless waste of drawer space. I chop nuts by hand. I slice cheese with a knife, and use a smooth stone to crush garlic. It has taken years to learn what everyone else probably knows about this fabulous instrument. My apologies. I was convinced of its usefulness as I watched a friend scramble eggs. The texture of the eggs was creamy and soft and perfect as he lifted and rolled them around the pan. Of course, it took a little butter, a good pan and timing panache, but ever since then we've called them "John Eddy Scrambled Eggs." Please believe its virtues aren't limited to eggs. Think of sautéing onions, browning ground beef, flipping pancakes or eggs or anything else placed in a skillet. What makes it more useful is the slight bend in the tines allowing you to gather a load of food bits that would fall off a regular spatula. The end of it is knife sharp allowing you to dig under that sticky pancake without destroying it. Most of all, I love it because Lamson has designed one for leftys. You'd be surprised how it doesn't even occur to manufacturers that a left-handed person might not find their ladle or pitcher or gravy boat useable for them.

And Finally...

The Gift of Fifty Years

When we arrived in Boston a few weeks ago, we rented a car to travel north into Maine where we were going to vacation for two weeks. As we pulled our luggage to the rental center, the line to the counter where five agents were serving customers was about a hundred people long. It took an hour to get to get to the front of the line. As we inched forward bit by bit we had plenty of time to observe the agents. Some seemed extremely crabby. Some took ages for a simple transaction. Others looked tired, hung over and got up to leave just as one was about to reach them. One man looked very gruff and I secretly hoped he would not be our agent. Of course, he was the one. As we gave him our data, Denis mentioned we were celebrating 50 years of marriage and this was our vacation. On hearing that his face dissolved into a beautiful smile as he congratulated us and asked about our children and grandchildren. As he finalized the contract he decided to upgrade our car to the next level for free. As we departed he pronounced a Muslim blessing over us and we blessed him back knowing in our hearts we referred to Yahweh not Allah. All this to say how quickly I judge by appearance and how easy it is to think this or that person has nothing to commend them – they being a great sinner, while I, I am one of God's chosen. In fact I am pleased that God busts me for such mean-spirited thoughts. I want to be a better person – one who lives always being reminded I'm no better than the one who knows nothing of the gift of life that comes to us through Jesus unless by his grace and mercy I am rescued.



And so, may your Advent Season and the New Year be filled with just what you need in order to become the person God intends you to be.



Warmly,

Margie Haack

P.S. Do you think it would be wrong to see if Fifty Years brought other gifts or benefits to our purchases?

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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