

# Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 2 **Spring 2019**



## Going home

We are saddened by the recent death of Denis' mother. At the same time just when we'd almost lost hope of spring ever arriving, the daffodils poked their green tongues through the frozen ground. Ever in need of redirecting my wandering heart, Holy Week is here now to remind us of the true Hope we have in Jesus. Recently, I came across an essay written 20 years ago when a dear friend, MaryJane Worden Clark died. Twenty years! As if we cannot comprehend the passing days of our lives we often declare: I can't believe it's been that long! Today it seems appropriate to resurrect it during this season of our lives.

Three days before she died, MaryJane, wrote:

*It's interesting to look back just a few days, and see how gradual, but inexorable this process is. (When was the last time I drove the car? Went for a hike? Felt like going out for dinner?) For awhile I was pretty intentional about anticipating all those 'last times' ... but now it just seems to be happening. (Hmm... I wonder if I'll ever have the strength to do a real shower again?) And while there seems to be little point in lamenting what's past, I do miss a lot of the small pleasures, like enjoying food, being able to take a walk comfortably, even just getting my body in and out of bed. Every day I'm surprised at how much less energy I have ...*

*Another frustration is not being able to get beyond a shallow, superficial level spiritually and emotionally. Drugs, I think. And so I continue to depend on you, friends, to remind me that God promises to be present with us through each part of the journey. I also need reminders that there can be something redemptive about pain and suffering...it's easy to lose sight of that in the swirling chaos of pain and discomfort that sometimes overcomes us here.*

Four weeks earlier, MaryJane and her family held a Celebration of Life. Knowing that she was in the final stages of melanoma she did not want to miss her own funeral so she invited the people she loved to join her for a good-by party—an afternoon of singing, Scripture reading, sharing

of prayers and memories, and a thirty minute roast of her life that had everyone laughing and crying. We were unable to join them, but so thankful that we'd visited MaryJane and Harry only three months earlier.

On March 31st she went Home.

### Waiting for consolation

Who or what consoles when you lose your best friend, your life companion, your wife, your mother?

In the middle of the last millennium, 1553 to be exact, Louis de Marc was held in the French prison at Lyon. While awaiting the sentence of death for heresy, he wrote this to the reformer, John Calvin:

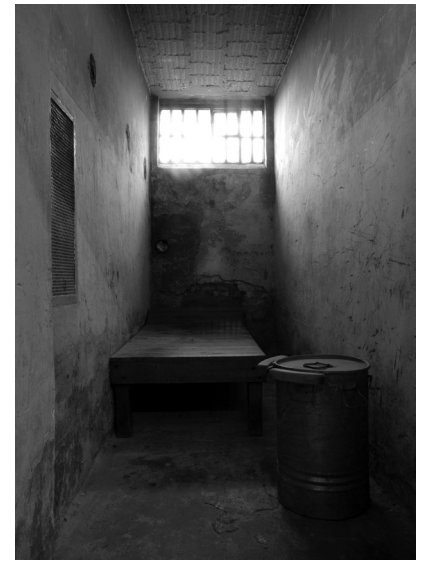
*Sir and brother,*

*I can not express to you the great comfort I have received from the letter which you have sent to my brother, Denis Peloquin, who found means to deliver it to one of our brethren who was in a vaulted cell above me, and read it to me aloud, as I could not read it myself, being unable to see anything in my dungeon. I entreat of you, therefore, to persevere in helping us with similar consolation, for it invites us to weep and to pray.*

- From *Letters of John Calvin*, Bonnet Edition.

Shortly after Louis de Marc was burned at the stake.

Late last year, after the holidays, our granddaughter, Manessah, sat on the bottom stair in our living



room sobbing. In her arms she clutched her blanket, pillow, and stuffed giraffe. As her mom's laundry basket, full of her clothes and books was carried past on its way to the car, she tried to rescue it from relatives who had apparently become thieves. Someone was even taking her new boots and putting them in a box! Four days of festivities had crashed every system in her two and a half year old soul and she was inconsolable.

How often in the aftermath of disasters, deaths, or even holidays do we find ourselves sitting on the bottom step in need of consolation? Sad that life is not what we long for? Depleted of energy and hope from living in a fallen world? Or suspicious because we don't get what God is up to? And if we don't know what he's up to can it be any good?

### The Power to Console

Two-thousand years ago Jesus was only eight days old when he was brought to the temple

for dedication and circumcision. Joseph and Mary weren't expecting a special welcome, but for years an old, old guy had been watching for just this moment and he spotted them in the crowd. Simeon, we are told, was waiting for "The Consolation of Israel". (Luke 2:25) How did he recognize them? What drew him? Did the hair stand up on the back of his neck? When Simeon saw them the Holy Spirit must have blazed inside. Hurrying over and taking God in his arms, he cried, "My eyes have seen your salvation."

Long ago certain East Indian sultans were called by a similar name: "The Nutmeg of Consolation." An intriguing title as nutmeg was a prized and valuable spice in the East Indies. In the sultan you might find both the pleasure of his rare presence and the power to remedy your troubles. Might. That is, if his curry had agreed with him. Or if he were still in the mood to receive petitions. But of course now sultans are mostly a thing of the past. That's only one reason why none can match "The Consolation of Israel." Jesus is the only one who has the everlasting presence and divine power to allay sorrow and grief. To console us from our sin. To comfort us in darkness. As Calvin writes in the above mentioned letter,

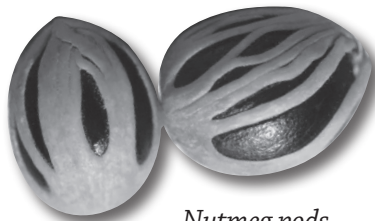
*...we have wherewith to comfort ourselves in all our miseries, looking for that happy issue which is*

*promised to us, that He will not only deliver us by His angels, but will Himself wipe away the tears from our eyes.*



*Simeon dedicated in the Temple  
Rembrandt, 1631 (Public Domain)*

So there it is. From the small child to the prisoner of Lyon, "The Consolation of Israel" brings us miracles as small as a letter that arrives at the perfect moment and as large as a shining escort through the door of this life into the next.



*Nutmeg pods*

I am certain some of God's consolation flies too high for my radar to detect. Some of it I see but don't understand. This I get:

Jesus Christ's salvation has begun in me, and without fail he will bring it on home. That is not only Consolation, it is Joy.

### **Post script about "The Nutmeg of Consolation"**

You may recognize this as the title to one of Patrick O'Brian's series of seafaring novels. In O'Brian's

book it is the name of a ship the captain imagines owning one day.

There were several other meanings to the phrase. Together Captain Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, his close friend and companion, played classical music together as a pastime on their long voyages. It was the title of a piece of music as you see in the following snippet of conversation. It was also an honorific for a sultan.

*Captain Aubrey: I dare say, what was the last piece?*

*Stephen Maturin (ship's surgeon and intelligence agent): Nutmeg of Consolation.*

*Aubrey: That's it. Those were the very words hanging there in the back of my mind. What a glorious name for a tight, sweet, newly-coppered broad-buttock little ship – a solace to any man's heart... Dear Nutmeg. What joy.*

To see the Nutmeg hove into sight, her sails sheeted to the wind, and you cast-away on an island with no hope of rescue—that would indeed be Consolation.

Although I have recommended this series of books before, I do it again. Begin with the first one MASTER AND COMMANDER. It is great summer reading.

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**Cover Photo:** Northern Blood Root. House Between garden.



# Family Notes



*Chihuly Cactus and Friends*



*The Runners: Jerem, Micah, Anson*



*Ready for the oven*

In April Anita and I had the great gift of traveling to Arizona to visit Peggy one of my bestest friends. This little holiday will energize the weeks ahead.

On the day I left, Minnesota was delivering her final weather trick of the year. As we left the house there were a few flakes in the air. When we arrived at the airport it had become a blizzard. By the time we boarded, the snow was flying so heavy we were deiced twice before takeoff. The entire planeload laughed our way into the air feeling sorry for the poor sods left behind while we winged our way to Phoenix.

Peggy is a brilliant host, it was like being comforted and cured of every ill one may have. The highlight was a day spent at the Arizona Botanical Gardens showcasing hundreds of the most beautiful desert plants God created. We were taken by surprise and drawn into the thorny riches of cacti and succulents dressed in neon spring colors.

While I was gone family visitors arrived to run the Chocolate Half Marathon in Minneapolis. With eleven people arriving to scatter throughout bedrooms and basement, I predicted a tiny bit of chaos. I was a little worried how Denis might deal since I'm SO indispensable during such events. What concerned me most was he'd need to make dinner on Saturday night. Not to worry. He made his famous maple curry chicken bake, a big pot of rice, steamed asparagus and French bread. Every morsel was consumed. I was very proud of him and happy to be reminded he's not nearly so helpless as I think. He'll definitely be on duty for the month of May.

# Ransom Notes

## Coming up

SUMMER and what you thought would be completely doable is actually Boot Camp for the unwary.

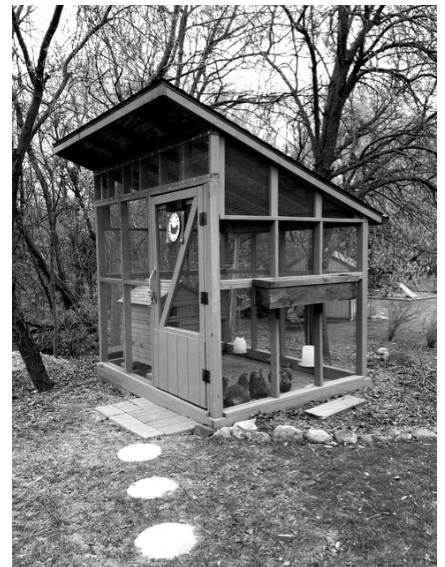
Does this happen to you? You look at the weeks ahead and think, great! The calendar is clear and I'm way ahead of the game. Besides my regular work, I'll plant the garden, attack mold in the bathtub and scrub out the chicken house. I'll read good books to improve my character which will also give best-book picks for that end of the year gift list I scramble to publish every November.

Suddenly, weeks fill with unexpected obligations, out-of-town company (not to say you aren't delighted to see them), with deadlines and appointments entirely forgotten, and celebrations you can't avoid.

To accomplish anything at all I'll need to be very stern with myself, especially since I know how easy it is to push aside things that are absolutely part of my calling and obedience to God. The problem is being the kind of person who thinks, yes, please kill me, I'll gladly be here because if I'm not who will love me? (Number 2 on the Enneagram. Dangit.)

You might pray I steady on and continue what seems to be a life-long mission – learning when to say “no” and when it is right to say yes whatever the cost. Fortunately, I'm blessed with a husband who knows how to say “no” and is happy to advise. We are good for each other, you understand? A little more self-restraint versus a little less reserve makes almost a perfect couple.

Life in Ransom has always been complicated like this – a crossing of boundaries from what could be technically called our “ministry” and the blending of ordinary living that touches the lives of others and something we work at every day. This is where most of us live – struggling with the dichotomy of the spiritual versus the physical and discerning where we are most in need of redemption from this error.



*Spring Cleaning. Check!*

Jerram Barrs writes in *Being Human*:

*All we do is to be done under the lordship of Christ – even washing the floors. Everything we do as human beings is spiritually important. There is no sacred and secular. ...That does not mean merely that we see practical value in “secular” tasks like peeling potatoes and washing the floor. It means far more: God himself delights in them because he has created the realm of the physical. Therefore, we are to value every part of our lives just as he does.*

Pray for us as we make our way through the summer months hoping to find the proper time for the writing and research we must do. For our commitments to our family, our local body, for those we invite to our home with a desire to love and encourage for the sake of the Gospel.

We thank God for so many of you who have prayed and supported us these many years. Thank you!

# And Finally...

As I prepare this issue of Letters it is Holy Week. More than ever when a loved family member goes home it lends deeper meaning to the celebration of Resurrection Day.



Marjorie Haack  
b. 10-10-1923, d. 3-6-2019.  
Final Christmas.

It seems appropriate to let Denis tell you about his mother's death in his own words. He writes:

*A few minutes before midnight on Ash Wednesday my mother died, passing from this life into the next. It was not unexpected, and she was ready. Her dementia was deepening, she was growing weaker physically, and she was becoming increasingly aware of how her memory was failing her. Thankfully my sister was able to be here so those who loved her were with her in the end. Still death is a horrible thing, and the full burden of that horror weighed on us as we waited by her bedside in the days leading to her passing.*

*"We are born, we eat, and learn, and die," writes Michael O'Brien in his novel Island of the World. "We leave a tracery of messages in*

*the lives of others, a little shifting of the soil, a stone moved from here to there, a word uttered, a song, a poem left behind. I was here, each of them declare. I was here."*

*The traces mother left are faint because she was never allowed the freedom to be herself. Always in the shadow of first, a domineering mother and later, a controlling husband, my memories of her always seemed to unfold on the edges of life. Away from the limelight we made each other laugh with jokes spiced with sarcasm, and though not a reader herself she seemed to understand my passion to get lost in stories. She shaped me, and she did so primarily with love.*

*Now in the presence of the One who sees her as significant, her life can be appreciated in ways that are gracious rather than legalistic. And being remembered for love is not a bad legacy.*

May the Hope and Joy of spring always be a Consolation to you.



Warmly,

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.

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