

# Letters from The House Between

Formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*

Issue 3 **Summer Into Fall 2019**



## The last straw

I think it was the video of a plastic straw stuck up the nostril of a sea tortoise leaking blood and a vet removing it that made me think I could live without straws. You probably know a lot more than I do about how plastics damage the environment. One affect that bothers me a lot is ocean pollution. These days most ocean creatures not only have plastic parts in their stomachs, microfibers are found throughout their digestive systems causing concern as they absorb the toxic chemicals from plastic. I can't do much about the oceans since I don't regularly dump my bilge water in the Atlantic. The little we *can* do might seem piddling against the impact of global plastic onslaught because it's everywhere from the packaging on my new

toothbrush to prescription bottles from the pharmacy, right? Where does one begin to change habits or help when the problem of pollution is so massive? What difference can one person make? However, that has never been a legitimate argument against doing the right thing or an excuse for doing nothing. So Denis and I have thought about what can we do to help by trying to eliminate some or at least limit our use of plastic or other things that damage the environment.

☛ We pick up a coffee at Starbucks now and then – I’m not going to say how often because you might judge me. I make such a deal out of being a coffee snob you’d think Starbucks was beneath me. Anyway, we’ve purchased their **refillable cups**. No more need for a new one any time we order.

☛ Straws. We **quit buying straws**. It’s embarrassing to admit I liked bendy head straws because at night I hardly need to raise my head for a sip of water – just bend the straw to my mouth. Humiliating. We don’t use them at restaurants anymore. My swallow works just fine without them.

☛ Water in plastic bottles from the supermarket. No more. I’m getting in the habit of taking my **refillable bottle** in the car whenever I leave the house. Seems I’m always thirsty. I used to provide a bottle of water for overnight guests. Now I invite them to take a glass up to the bedroom with them.



☛ Plastic wrap. This has been a little more difficult to replace. I purchased **beeswax wraps** that cover open dishes or protect things like cheese or deli meat. They are cumbersome but you can wash and reuse them over and over. Wax paper also has more uses than we think.

☛ Easy to do: we keep **cloth tote bags** in the trunk of the car so when we go to the grocery store, I just grab several to take in thus avoiding the temptation to use plastic grocery bags.

### Prayers of the People

A person doesn’t need to be crunchy granola to change their lifestyle a little to help protect the earth. There are reasons for caring embedded in what it means to be a Christian. When we first began attending Church of the Cross I had not been exposed to a regular part of the Sunday service devoted to what is called Prayers of the People. Among other things we are reminded each Sunday that part of our work and calling as humans is to take care of the natural world around us. This part of the prayer is often framed with words from

the Book of Common Prayer: “Give us reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.” From the beginning of creation God told us we were to be stewards of the earth. A steward is “one who is called to exercise

responsible care over possessions entrusted to him or her.” We are required to do it in a way that doesn’t merely exploit it for profit or for one’s own convenience.

In the five years we have lived at the House Between we’ve observed land around us being devoured by huge developments. Small farmlands, ponds, fens and forests have been turned into condos and homes large enough to each house dozens of people from other parts of the world. When we first moved here fox and coyotes passed through our yard and along the edge of the woods. It grieves us that it has been a year since we’ve seen any. On our neighborhood website people complain about coyotes and want city officials to “take care of them.” They’re afraid of them and fear for their little dogs. One neighbor noted that it used to be that each spring you’d see a lot of rabbits, but as summer wore on there were fewer. Coyotes and foxes controlled the population and indeed, a couple years ago I watched a fox trot across the yard holding her head high so as not to drag the rabbit dangling from her mouth.



They've mysteriously disappeared and we've heard the county "took care of them." Meantime the rabbits reproduce, well, like rabbits do. When I walk in our yard there are always rabbits frozen in the grass. They eat our flowers, shrubs and my cucumbers – the only vegetable I managed to plant this spring. When I approach they bound away only to return as soon as I leave.

To be honest, I have contributed to pollution and destruction, too. We live on 3/4 of an acre that slopes into a wooded ravine behind us. When it rains the water drains off into a little creek down below and from there flows into the Credit River on its way to the Minnesota River and finally into the Mississippi only a few miles downstream. We like our lawn lush and weed free like others on our cul-de-sac. It's the American way. It costs far more to hire a company using organic applications, but last year with certain invasive weeds growing like mad we went with one of the chemical companies who love to claim that nothing they use causes permanent poisoning to anything or anyone. All the water contaminated with pesticides and chemical fertilizer that runs off our property ends up in our watershed. It turns out that according to "the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a study of 9,282 people nationwide, found pesticides in 100% of the people who had both blood and urine tested. The average person carried 13 of 23 pesticides tested." (eartheasy.com) That's just one consequence. This year we are back with

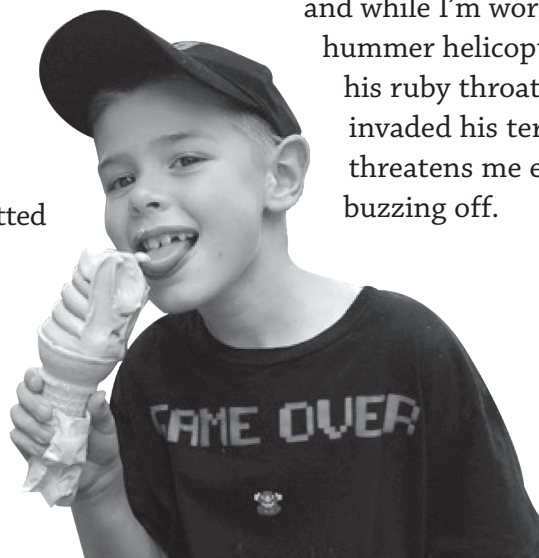


GreenCore Organics for the time being. I wish we had the guts and energy to keep our yard another way. Make a prairie garden, perhaps.

### Irrepressible Creation

While it can be complicated and discouraging to see the damage that exists, there are times we witness things that give hope that even small efforts make a difference in caring for the earth.

I have a friend with twin boys who just turned seven. Without being told they often head out to pick up trash in the neighborhood with a bag and one of those nifty little trash grabbers. The other day they had put in about an hour at this when a kind priest spotted them and gave them a \$20.00 bill to get themselves a treat. Their mother reports



"They bought ice cream and generously gave me one too! There is \$10 left over and now they are absolutely delighted at their newfound wealth and can't decide where to even begin to spend it." They have always been cool little kids.

It is summer here as it is all over our country. Sunny days follow on days of clouds and rain. The wood outside my window lights up in a million different shades of green when the sun sends rays down through the canopy. It makes me think how lovely not to have only one color of green. How boring that would be. A doe wanders past and pauses to nibble the hostas. She is in her red-brown summer dress and twitches her tail to chase off bugs revealing her bright white flag beneath. Trailing behind are her tiny, spotted twins. Several male turkeys cross the yard jog-walking in a line, a single decorative feather hanging from their neck like a fancy tie as if they're late to an important meeting. I am staking the tomatoes growing in pots on the deck. They sit beneath the hummingbird feeder and while I'm working suddenly a hummer helicopters in my face, his ruby throat aglow. I have invaded his territory and he threatens me eye to eye before buzzing off.

# Ransom Notes

## Wasting time can be a good thing.

Alan Lightman writes in his book (In Praise of Wasting Time) that in the business, technology and computer world, “downtime’ is a dirty word. It ... is considered useless time, empty time. But for the lush and mysterious terrain of our minds, downtime is a chance to explore. It is a time to renew.”



Summer is when most of us take vacation, and how we plan matters. People live in very different settings and pursue very different callings so it makes sense that getting away is not going to look the same for everyone. But inevitably many arrive home so exhausted they need a vacation from vacation. Planning downtime requires careful thought in order to be refreshed and renewed. Reminding ourselves that Christ is Lord of all of life including time off and that God calls us to both rest and work is something we have emphasized over the years. I’m doing it again in case you need either the reminder or permission to turn out the work lights.

## Honored to Serve

You’d think we would be thoroughly used to uncertainty but, financial lean times in summer causes us to pause. Do we keep going or allow Ransom to be done? We are grateful for your prayers and support. It has allowed us to write, speak, give love and hospitality to many. It never gets old. It never stops being a privilege to follow this calling.

Sometimes we receive interesting, even humorous donations from our readers. Recently one came from Texas from a couple who escaped Minnesota winters and settled in a warmer place. The check was oddly written with the [dollar amount] plus 36 cents. I wondered what’s up with 36 cents exactly? In a note he explained it would have been more except the Navigators asked for a contribution. And the “36 cents rounds out my account balance.” Aha.

Another friend from Massachusetts sent a generous gift and explained she had received “a large inheritance from a distant unknown relative” and was sharing some of it with Ransom! Oh! Wouldn’t we all like to wake up one day to find an official letter announcing a distant unknown relative has left us a large inheritance? It made us laugh at the surprise she must have had. We rejoiced with her as one who surely deserves this unexpected gain.

## Rhythms

**“Self-care requires limits and rhythms. It does not come easily. It begins by recognizing that we are finite creatures who rebel against the reality of our limitations. This rebellion is fueled by a culture that often pretends there are no limits in this life. But more fully embracing our limits allows us to accept what God is doing in our lives and ministry.”**

**—Resilient Ministry by Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, Donald Guthrie**



# Family Notes

## On Holiday

On page six I exhorted us to be thoughtful about vacation. Taking my own advice in June we went to my all-time-favorite “away place” – The Boundary Waters up north. There is just one lodge in all of the BWCA, grandfathered in, where you can stay in a cabin. I love that nothing motorized is allowed on the lakes. No roads to drive on. Just the one leading to Kawishiwi Lodge. The only sounds are waves against the shore, splashes of paddles, voices of children playing, and sometimes



*Evening kayak to the cabin*

loons calling and wolves howling. We sit on the dock and breathe air scented with pine and fresh lake water. We took saunas every evening. At night you can actually see the Milky Way. The quiet and peaceful beauty is something I bank and take with me all year. If I could, I would give this as a gift to everyone I know.

## At Home

My chickens. This imperfect world! They have leg lice – a disgusting vermin that live and reproduce beneath the scales on their legs. If not treated they continue to invade until the feet and legs of the chicken become distorted and lame. The best treatment is not something I look forward to doing. According to a sound source one must immerse their legs in gasoline for 45 seconds, air dry, then slather with Vaseline. They also seem to have mites. All this because the wild turkeys and birds carry them. No way to control that. Sadly Annie died. Not sure what took her but as she grew sicker and didn't want to leave the roosting house, the others stayed with her almost like they were keeping vigil. Then Eudora got fly paper stuck in her tail. I thought it was out of the way and doing its job catching the gnat plague, but somehow she got in a tangle with it and I had to cut off all but two of her luxurious tail feathers. These are definitely the first world whines of a faux backyard henkeeper.



*Eudora's Tail Reduction*

# And Finally...

"I want to live here." That was Anita's response to our week long stay at a cabin in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area – a Superior National Forest area set aside for people to enjoy the wild pristine nature of lake, forest and all the creatures who live there.

We forget how God's creation can rest and restore our minds and bodies. This is one place where that happens. As life dictates we cannot live in such places all the time. But I wish everyone could find a way to experience the amazing peace and rest that comes from escaping our noisy, busy modern lives. To live by the rhythms of the sun and moon. To be where the noise of machines can't be heard. To step outside at night and witness the awesome Milky Way which can no longer be seen in the city.

If you have options and the possibility of making plans for your self or your family you could think ahead and consider leaving behind the Valley Fairs and the Six Flags and even the educational trips to museums or to family and friends living in other urban areas and in exchange head out to remote places where there may not even be a cell phone signal.

There was a time when we took our young family to the BWCA to camp and canoe. It is often the case for all ages that at first we don't know what to do with ourselves, because we THINK there is NOTHING to do. Inevitably, that feeling passes as we adjust to down time. We acquire new eyes and ears. The rhythms of our bodies change to a kinder slower pace. So, we swam, fished, sat around a fire, watched the sun set and the moon ascend. When we left after ten days one of our first stops was a pizza place in Ely, MN. We were shocked and thrilled when our kids complained about the noise of the pinball machines, the music, and people talking loudly. Mission accomplished.

If I wish anything for you, it is to find space in your life to enjoy time apart where you can be refreshed and renewed.



*Early morning calm*



Warmly,

Margie

## 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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